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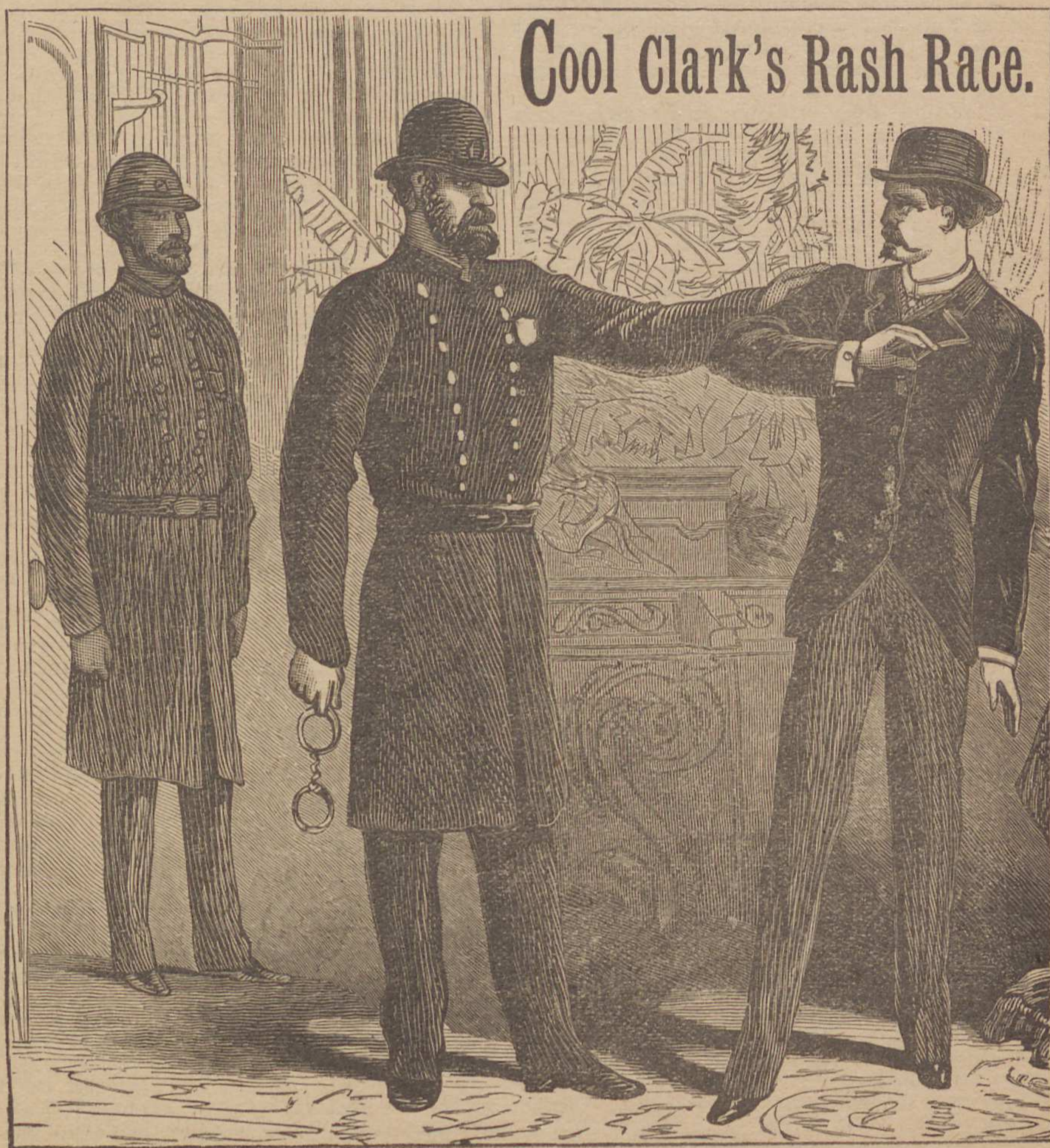
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Cool Clark's Rash Race;

OR,

THE YOUNG NIHILIST.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF "THE DESERT ROVER," "LAME TIM," "HONEST HARRY," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A RING OF FIRE.

THE sky was clear and bright. The sun poured down its glittering beams with all the ardor of midsummer. Yet the air had the tingling frosty feel of a Minnesota winter's day, and the gleaming snow and ice were full of shivering hints. The occasional blast of air that blew over the scene cut like a knife as it made the icicles, which hung from the tree-twigs, clink like silver bells.

The scene was a strange one. On one side rose the palace-like mansions of a great city. On the other was the broad level of a wide river, whose banks were formed of massive walls of granite. But no glimmer of water appeared. A smooth expanse of ice extended as far as the eye could reach. And on this ice thousands of people were gathered, strangely dressed, and gayly enjoying the out-door sports of a Russian winter.

For the city was the Russian capital of St. Petersburg, the far-famed "star of the north." The frozen river was the broad Neva, whose flowing surface for half the year was clad in fetters of ice. And these merry-makers were the varied population of the great capital, serf and noble side by side as they entered with zest into the winter sports.

Here a group of gay skaters shot with sportive speed over the glass like ice, laughing merrily as their bright-colored scarfs streamed like pennants in the air. There a line of sleighs, drawn by mettlesome horses, shot swiftly past, the bells ringing out in musical clatter to the sound of the hoofs. Here was a wandering merchant, with his hot buns for sale. There a tea-vender, seated before his steaming stove.

And people of every rank were present, from the furred nobleman and the uniformed officer, with their bright-faced and richly-dressed ladies, to the peasant in his high boots and sheep-skin coat, the merchant in his long blue caftan and Tartar hat, and the priest with full white beard descending to his waist.

The center of principal interest seemed to be a point at which a miniature mountain rose from the surface of the ice. This was a doubly sloping hill, built of light frame-work, the one slope presenting a series of wooden steps leading to the summit, the other a smooth sheet of glittering ice. Up the stairs toiled an endless line of merry-makers, dragging after them their long, low sleds. Down the ice-slope streamed as endless a line. Like lightning they shot down the smooth decline, with such speed that the narrow sleds sped far away over the level surface of the river.

It was an artificial coasting-hill, made by laying blocks of ice side by side, and pouring water over them, which quickly froze into a smooth path in the keen Russian air.

For hours the sport had continued, laughing troops following each other in quick succession, while crowds of lookers-on stood thickly around. Occasionally an accident happened by the overturning of a sled, or a collision between two of the sledgers. But every such trouble ended in a laugh, and a return to the scene of sport.

But now a new phase of the game attracted the eager attention of all the observers. A youthful figure on skates appeared on the glassy surface of the hill. Down he came, with a frightful velocity, still holding himself upright as he shot like lightning along the slippery slope.

Every eye was fixed, every breath suspended, for it was a perilous enterprise. Nothing of the kind had ever been seen there before. If he should fall he might be crushed beneath the plunging sleds, and it seemed impossible that he could hold himself erect.

The daring skater was a tall, graceful youth, with bright, glowing face, and long hair that streamed from under his close cap. A shout of exultation came from his lips as he reached the bottom of the slope and glided out upon the level surface of the river, still upright.

His cry was echoed by a roar of voices. The excitement of the on-lookers found vent in shouts of congratulation and in ardent praise of the daring youth.

They were too soon. His feet struck some obstruction on the ice, and down he went, hurled far along by the frightful speed at which he had been moving.

The cries were hushed. A shudder passed through the crowd. Twenty heavily-laden sleds were shooting swiftly in the wake of the skater and in an instant more would be heaped upon his prostrate form.

It was no trifling peril, for the sleds were moving with the speed of cannon-balls. But at this critical moment a slender, sinewy fellow leaped from the throng, caught the fallen youth by the shoulders, and with one quick jerk dragged him out of the path of the sleds, which the next instant came plunging by.

"Confound you for a risky young rascal!" cried the rescuer in angry tones, as he set the youth on his feet. "Don't you ever try that on again. I didn't think there was a fool in all Russia that would take such a risk."

"Maybe not," answered the youth, coolly, as he brushed the snow from his clothes. "But I calculate that Russia hasn't got all the fools. There are some left outside."

It was plain that he was not a Russian, for he spoke with a strong foreign accent.

"So you're a stranger," returned the Russian. "What nation, I pray? You're not a German. And you don't look like an Englishman."

"What do you think of Yankee?" was the lad's answer. "Genuine American. Clean out; straight from the shoulder; you bet!"

"American! I might have known it," rejoined the Russian, while all around looked on with interest. "It is just like the daring of the

Yankees. They don't care a fig for their lives."

"Now don't you be talking no such blooming nonsense as that," returned the young skater, with a comical shrug. "I calculate there's some common sense emigrated to America. We ain't all idiots, if we are ready to take a wild bit of risk now and then."

The Russian looked with interest at the fresh face, high brows and proud look of the speaker, who seemed as if he was ready to sustain the honor of his country against the world. The Russian himself was not an ordinary-looking person. There was a stern decision in the lines of his thin countenance, and a flashing light in his clear blue eyes that spoke of daring and energy. He was dressed in the ordinary attire of the St. Petersburg *moujik*, a close sheep-skin coat, with woolly side turned in, high boots into which his thick pantaloons were thrust, and a furred hat with flaps drawn over his ears.

He looked with new interest at the young man on learning his nationality, and lightly touched him on the arm, saying in low, guarded tones:

"Come aside with me; I have something for your ear."

The young man looked up into the earnest face of the speaker.

"All right," he said indifferently. "I guess I'm a trifle in your debt."

The *moujik* led through the throng, words of praise falling on the ears of the young American as he followed with an air of easy carelessness.

In a few minutes they had reached an unoccupied space on the outside of the crowd. There were hundreds of people around, however, in all directions, while vehicles of every sort dashed to and fro.

The Russian looked warily around him. No one was within easy hearing. He spoke in a low, cautious voice:

"You are an American! You belong to that land of liberty where men are born with a feeling for the oppressed of every nation. You are young and daring. Have you the heart to assist a man in peril?"

"I dunno as I'm easy scared," answered the youth, with a drawling accent. "I guess I owe you one, for I might have been clawed up badly only for you. Pitch it out! Let's hear what's in the wind."

"I am surrounded by foes," whispered the Russian. "I am wanted by the Government. Agents of the police are all around me. They are slowly closing in on me. I know it, though they think I am blind to their presence. I will be seized if I attempt to leave the river. I will be seized if I stay here."

His voice was thrilling with emotion. The youth looked around him, but could see no evidence that any one was paying attention to his companion. He answered with a shrug of doubt.

"Haven't you been dreaming a trifle? Folks here don't seem to be bothering their brains about you."

"You don't know Russia," was the intense reply. "If you have ever been on a prairie in your own country and surrounded with a circle of fire, then you will know. I tell you that the

fire is all around me. I see no escape. The penalty is death or Siberia."

He spoke this last word in a shuddering tone, as if it meant something far worse than death. It meant exile to the terrible mines of the frozen North, the home of death-in-life.

"Say the word," cried the youth excitedly. "Let it out. What can I do?"

"Let me have your skates," rejoined the Russian. "You are in no danger. With them I can make a dash for safety. I rescued you from death. You owe me something in return."

"I dunno about the death," answered the daring young Yankee. "I've crawled out of worse scrapes than that. But you can have the skates, if you can peg out of trouble on them."

He seated himself on the ice to remove his skates. The Russian crouched before him.

"Do not let them see what we are at," he said. "Let me once get on the skates and he will be a swift man that overtakes me."

A minute sufficed for the exchange. The skates were screwed firmly on the heavy boots of the "suspect," whose face was burning with the excitement of hope. He continued to crouch on the ice however.

"Leave me," he cautiously remarked. "You are in more danger than you think. Leave me and hide in the crowd. I will not stir till you are well out of sight."

"Maybe that's good advice," rejoined the youth. "I ain't sure that they could hear the scream of the American Eagle away off here, and I don't care to see the inside of a Russian lock-up. Good-by and good-luck."

He walked carelessly away. A short distance brought him into the crowd that surrounded the ice slide. Reaching here he stopped and looked toward his late companion, who was still crouched upon the ice.

Suddenly the latter sprang to his feet. A graceful gliding motion showed in an instant that he was a practiced skater. And now the youth saw that the strange tale told him was a true one. A ring of more than twenty men had suddenly appeared, encircling the Russian and closing in upon him.

They were ununiformed. They were, in fact, the secret agents of the Russian Government. Nor did the skates of the fugitive give him any advantage, for they were all similarly provided. He moved uncertainly to and fro in the midst of the closing circle as if in doubt what to do.

The heart of the youth throbbed with impatience and anger.

"Why don't the fool make a break?" he queried, half aloud. "Much use giving him my skates. He's a gone sucker if he don't dive for it. Hang his picture, I thought he had more go in him than that!"

His soliloquy was brought to a sudden conclusion by the fall of a heavy hand on his shoulder, and the stern vision of a bearded face thrust closely in to his.

"Hillo, neighbor!" he cried. "What's bu'sted? S'pose you just lift that paw."

"Hardly," answered the other. "You are my prisoner. You have been aiding a criminal to escape. Do you know what that means in Russia?"

CHAPTER II.

A DASH FOR LIBERTY.

THE events we have just chronicled had caused a sudden flush of excitement in the surrounding crowd. They fell off on seeing the capture of the young American as if in fear of infection. In a moment an open space surrounded him and his captor. Remarks like the following passed among the timid people:

"I knew it! He looks like a villain."

"Nobody but a daring rascal would skate down that hill."

"Look at his evil face! I wonder if he has committed murder."

"I wager he is a Nihilist."

At this dreaded word the crowd drew still further back, with looks of affright. The very name of a Nihilist was growing to be a terror in Russia.

The young American remained silent in the grasp of his captor. He was interested in something else, which now attracted the attention of the crowd also. For the Russian skater, who was circling doubtfully within the ring of men who surrounded him, now made a desperate dash toward one portion of the line.

The skaters moved quickly up to intercept him, yet he kept on as if determined to force his way through. He was nearly within reach of a burly fellow before him, whose arms were outstretched to grasp him, when he made a sharp turn, and dashed off at a rapid flight in another direction.

There was a quick reverse movement of his foes, but it was too late. His former maneuver had made a blank space in the line, and in a twinkling he was through it.

A shout of exultation burst from his lips.

"Come on!" he shouted, in ringing accents. "Here's the river before us. My cap to the man that runs me down!"

He was off like a flash, with a straight, smooth stroke that told the practiced skater. There was a moment of confusion ere his baffled captors got upon his track. Away he shot, over the smooth ice, a hundred paces in advance.

"Hurrah!" cried the young American. "By Christopher Columbus but he's a coon! I knew it was in him! I knew he'd show his heels to the police!"

This exclamation was in good Yankee English. It was like so much Greek to the policeman, who still kept his hand on the shoulder of the youth. But the tone was unmistakable.

"You're a friend of his, are you?" asked the Russian harshly. "You lent him your skates. You aided him to escape. Come with me; you are a dangerous character."

He dragged his captive forward as he spoke.

"Let go, you big-whiskered ourang!" cried the latter angrily. "I don't know the man from a side of leather. But he can skate like a swallow. Let go, I say! Maybe you don't know who you're holding."

"Who are you? You're not the Prince Royal of Germany?" asked the officer, with a sneer.

"No, but I'm first cousin to the President of the great United States. I'm a nephew of Uncle Sam. If you don't let me slide you'll find

you've stirred up a hornet's nest as big as the barracks."

"Come ahead now, little whipper-snapper. I fancy we've got scissors in Russia big enough to clip your wings."

The powerful officer dragged his captive onward. They were now out of the throng, and on a clear space of ice not far from the river-side.

Far down the icy plain went on the flight and chase of the fugitive Russian. On with long swift strides he darted, at a speed that none of his pursuers could emulate. They toiled heavily on in his rear, with curses and imprecations. By the time they had passed the limits of the crowd he was a quarter-mile in advance.

Some spiteful pistol bullets were sent singing after him, but they whistled uselessly through the air. He laughed in scorn as he waved his hat defiantly behind him.

"Free Russia forever! Come on, you dogs of the despot! I defy you to catch Ivan Stretzlitz."

On he sped down the smooth ice, now far below the crowd, though many sleighs shot along the snow-covered edge of the stream. Behind him came his pursuers, following with the persistency of the sleuth-hound, though the best of them was no match for the swift fugitive.

Meanwhile the captor of the young American had dragged his prisoner beyond the thick of the throng, and was heading toward the granite quay, with which both banks of the river were lined.

"Now see here, old boss," cried the indignant boy. "I like fun, but this is rubbing it in. Let go my collar if you know when you're well off. If you don't—"

"Go on, little wasp. What will you do?" came the scornful demand.

"I'll show you a Yankee trick, that's all."

"You show me a trick?" The burly officer looked down on his captive as an elephant might look on a cat.

"Yes, and here it is."

How it happened could not be easily told. There was a quick trip, a wild swaying of legs and arms, as the Russian sought to keep his footing on the ice, and then down he went like a felled ox, his head striking the hard surface with a crack like a cocoanut.

"I bet he sees a whole sky full of stars!" cried the Yankee boy, springing away with a gay laugh.

He headed straight toward the quay, but he had not gone ten steps before his boots slipped on a smooth spot, and he went down in a heap.

He quickly sprung to his feet again, but the felled policeman was now up, and rushing toward him with brandished club.

"I'll brain you if you stir!" he shouted. "You treacherous imp, stir at your peril!"

The reckless youth started to run; but he was still on the same treacherous spot, and his feet again slipped. Ere he could recover, the officer had him by the shoulder, and was brandishing the club over his head.

"You Yankee dog!" he hissed. "You have had your sport; it is my turn now!"

The club came down viciously. Only that the boy jerked his head quickly aside he would have been felled by the blow. With a vicious oath the infuriated officer again raised his weapon; but it did not come down, for a sudden and unexpected event at that moment happened.

All that we have described had been observed by more than the parties interested and the staring crowd. A group of skaters, who moved on the skirts of the throng, seemed to take a more active interest in it. As the lad was led away by his captor, several of these followed, circling about as if they were concerned only in sport.

When the officer made his vicious blow, two powerfully-built skaters were close at hand. The uplifted club did not again descend, for at that instant the two men darted up, one on each side. In a moment they had caught the officer's arms, and with a harsh Russian malediction they drew him sharply backward, kicking his heels from under him.

Down he went again, with force enough to crack any ice less than a foot thick.

All these events had passed so quickly that it was impossible for any one to come to the aid of the discomfited officer, though now several men were moving hastily toward the spot.

"Quick!" cried the two men, in hasty accents. "Come with us, boy, or you are lost."

Seizing the young American's arms, one on each side, they skated swiftly away, sliding him onward between them. Sharp cries came from behind, and the men of whom we have spoken put themselves in pursuit. Two or three of them were on skates, and a quick chase followed.

The two men who held the boy were at a disadvantage. They would quickly have been overtaken but for the apparently awkward movements of several skaters, who got in the way of and hindered the pursuers.

"Clear the way, you stupid idiots!" cried one of the latter, furiously. "We are officers of the law! We will arrest you if you interfere with us!"

He had hardly spoken ere one of the awkward squad fell at full length immediately in front of him. He was moving too rapidly to stop, and away he went sprawling over the prostrate man.

The latter sprang to his feet and sailed away with a laugh of disdain. It was evident that the apparent awkwardness was part of a well-managed game to cover the escape of the flying prisoner.

In a moment more the game of the rescuers was apparent. An empty sleigh stood on a snowy spot near the line of the quay. Into this the two men flung the youth as if he had been a bale of merchandise. They leaped in after him and seized the reins. The mettled horses darted swiftly away.

"Stoop! Stoop!" cried the man at the ribbons, in tones of warning.

It was just in time, for a brace of bullets whistled over their bent heads. The baffled officers were trying the effect of pistol practice.

With a crack as loud as that of a pistol, the long whip unfolded its lash in the air and fell on the leading horse, which had been lagging in the traces.

With a quick spurt the animal sprang forward. The shaft horses followed. Away went the team at a mad pace down the ice-bound stream, quickly leaving their pursuers far in the rear, and winding in and out perilously among the other vehicles on the river.

The sleigh was a very handsome one, furlined, and with thick fur robes. It was drawn by three mettled iron-gray horses, two in the shafts and one as leader, the latter running with such long traces that he seemed no part of the sleigh outfit.

"Go it, old chaps!" cried the rescued youth, in delight. "This is what I call sport. Didn't know you did things up this way in Russia."

"We do many queer things in Russia, in these days," answered one of the men. "We live here now with our lives in our hands. It would have been a Siberia job for you, boy, only for us."

"What made you take all this trouble then? You don't know me."

"You rescued Ivan Stretzlitz. You have made ten thousand friends in Russia by that act. He who helps one of us helps us all. Life for life is the motto of the free Russians."

The boy looked at the earnest face of the speaker, and a low whistle came from his lips.

"That's prime," he muttered. "But don't you drive a gallus team for your sort of folks?"

A laugh of triumph came from the man's bearded lips.

"We have borrowed this sleigh, boy," he answered. "It belongs to one of the dukes of the empire. He had left it standing empty for a minute just when we wanted it."

"You stole a duke's sleigh! Oh! cracky! If this ain't a nice joke I'll give in! But, bless me for a high old coon, if I haven't put my foot in it!"

Some excitement had been created in the line of vehicles by the spectacle of the well-known sleigh of the titled dignitary whirling at such a pace through them, and with such unaccustomed occupants.

But its speed rendered pursuit hopeless. After a few minutes it left the river, at a convenient place, and sped up into the streets of the city.

Onward for five minutes more, through street after street. The sounds of excitement were left far behind them. A quiet, deserted side-street was now reached. The horses were drawn up with a jerk.

"Out, boy!" cried the men, as they sprang to the pavement.

A lash of the whip on the horses, and they darted off again, with the empty sleigh.

"And now, my lad, to cover; for there will be the very Old Nick to pay for this day's work."

They hurried onward, followed by the rescued lad.

CHAPTER III.

A BOY WITH A GENIUS FOR SCRAPES.

WITHIN a handsome apartment of a large St. Petersburg mansion were two persons, a lady and a gentleman. Inside the room it was as warm as mid-summer, although it was piercing cold outside. Not a breath of the outer air

could get into that room, with its close double windows, while a genuine Russian stove, a huge affair of brick and iron, sent a flood of heat through the room.

Russian houses are built for warmth, not for ventilation. Flowers bloomed in the windows of the room as though they had been in a summer garden of the tropics. The furniture was rich and costly. Valuable pictures graced the walls. Delicate articles of vertu adorned every available space in the apartment.

The persons present were evidently not Russians. They looked more like Americans in face and attire. The lady had a fresh, delicately cut face, with bright blue eyes. She was young pretty and tastefully dressed. Her companion was a handsome middle-aged gentleman, enough like her to be her father.

"Clark is in some trouble again; I know he is," she pettishly declared, as she walked nervously about the room. "He has a perfect genius for getting into scrapes."

"At any rate, Helen, you must admit that he has a genius for getting out of them," was the laughing reply.

"But he is so wild and reckless. It is two days now since we have seen him, and no one knows where he is or what mischief he is in. I declare he quite puts me out."

Her slender fingers drummed impatiently on the table.

"But, my dear," answered the gentleman, leaning easily back in his chair, "this is not the first time by a dozen. Yet you know he always turns up right."

"But he gets into all sorts of wild company, you know that. Look what a harum-scarum way of talking he has picked up. One might think he had been trained in a horse stable, and you can do nothing with him. You might as well talk to a post. He is just incorrigible."

The gentleman continued to laugh at her excited impatience.

"You know that is my idea of training, Helen," he remarked. "I want my children to know the world, and be fit to deal with it. I began by giving you both a solid training in honor, honesty, and good sense. I fancy the person that has those three elements can go through fire without getting scorched. I hardly think you are the worse for being allowed to have your own way. As for Clark let him sow his wild oats. He gets into scrapes, but he has never done a thing yet to be ashamed of."

"Oh, he is a good boy enough. But he is getting to be as rough and uncouth as a nutmeg grater."

"That is only the shell to the cocoanut, my dear. He is sweet as milk inside. We can soon rub all that off. And now, will you let me read my newspaper?"

There was a comical distress in his tone that made the young lady break out into a silvery laugh.

"You are as bad as he," she declared, as she turned quickly away.

He unfolded the paper, and was soon lost in its contents. A knitted expression came upon his brow as he continued to read.

"More Nihilist troubles, Helen," he remarked. "Here's a daring escape of one of the ring-

leaders of the party. One Ivan Stretzlitz, a fellow who is concerned in some of their deepest schemes, has skated himself right out of the hands of a score of policemen. They pursued him for ten miles down the Neva, but he flung the snow in their faces, and gave them the slip."

"Good!" she cried excitedly. "That was a daring act!"

"That may be, Helen. But remember you are in Russia. It is dangerous here to praise the doings of Nihilists. Here's more of it. Another party snatched a prisoner from the hands of the police, stole the sleigh of Duke Shuvaloff, and drove away in the teeth of the authorities. They made their escape, too."

"Good!" she repeated. "And I do not care who hears it. I can't choke down my American blood for all the Czars of all the Russias."

"You and Clark are born rebels, I do believe," he answered, as he continued to read.

But his face grew grave, his brow contracted, and a look of anxiety came into his face. He crushed the paper somewhat together in his hand, with a nervous clutch.

She observed his face with a sensation of dread.

"What is it?" she cried. "You have not read me all."

"Nothing of consequence."

"Yes it is. There is something about Clark. I know there is. Oh, read it! He is in some trouble!"

"I fancy he is all right."

"Let me have the paper! You are concealing something!"

"No, no, my child. It is all right. Clark was in it. But he is safe."

"What is it?" she hotly demanded, while her face turned pale. "Tell me the whole of it! What has the unhappy young rebel been doing now?"

"It must be Clark," he rejoined. "An American boy lent his skates to Ivan, the fugitive. He was arrested by an officer, but he tripped the officer down on the ice, and escaped. It was he and some persons that helped him who took possession of the duke's sleigh. They have left the police in the lurch. No trace of them can be found."

"It was Clark! It must have been Clark!" she excitedly cried. "It was just like him! He helped the poor fugitive! And he fooled all the police of St. Petersburg! Good for Clark!" and she clapped her hands as if overjoyed in the prowess of her scapegrace brother.

"I do not know which is the worst of you," answered the father, with a perplexed look. "I wish my business was only settled up here. I would like to take you both into safer latitudes."

"He will come out all right. He always does," she declared.

"Go on, puss. Turn the tables on me. I hope so, but I don't like this mixing with Nihilists."

"We must hide him away, or ship him off."

"We must catch him first."

The sound of an opening and shutting door seemed to echo their words. Some one was evidently coming.

While this conversation had been in progress, out in the streets of the city a youthful figure had been gliding heedfully along. The young American, for it was he, kept in all the retired and half-deserted streets, pushing his way under the shadows of the towering Russian houses.

He was enveloped in a thick cloak that covered him like a mantle, while its high collar, and his drawn-down cap front, half-concealed his face. That kind of concealment was easy, in a Russian winter day, with the temperature ten below zero.

After pursuing these retired avenues as far as possible, he at length emerged upon the crowded Nefski Prospect, the grand street of St. Petersburg.

This splendid, broad street, with its rows of palatial mansions on each side and its brilliant range of stores, is not surpassed in Europe. Its wide pavements were densely thronged with all the fashion of the Russian capital, while its snow-covered avenue presented a wonderful array of sleighs, carriages, carts and teams of every sort, size and pattern, many of them of strange fashions, such as are seen nowhere out of Russia.

The boy walked easily along, with the feeling that there was, perhaps, more safety in a crowd than in the deserted streets. The avenue was very familiar to him, yet he could not avoid noticing the curious character of the store signs that lined the whole fronts of some of the buildings.

These were not printed but painted signs. The front of one store was covered with paintings of giant boots, shoes and slippers; while on another bonnets, flowers and feathers appearing in glaring colors. Here were ladies in full ball costume, so thin that one shivered with cold to look at them. There, on a fruit store, were grapes as large as apples, and apples as large as pumpkins, while oranges, peaches, pears, etc., made the store front look like a tropical fruit-garden. All down the street this array of glaringly-colored signs continued, until the houses looked like a pictorial directory.

There was no difficulty in discovering what any one had to sell, even to a foreigner. The lack of education in the common people of the city made this sort of sign-board necessary.

The young fugitive walked on for some distance through the crowd, carefully looking out for signs of danger. At length he paused before one of the handsomest mansions on that part of the street, and taking a last cautious look around him, opened the door and entered. It was this sound that had been heard by the fatherly gentleman and the young lady in the salon above.

In a minute afterward the young truant broke gayly into the room in which his father and sister awaited him with grave faces. But the boy was too full of vim to be easily checked.

"Back again, father, you see," he cried, clasping his father's hand with a warm pressure. "How goes it, sis? Give me a buss!" He flung his arms around her neck and gave her a brotherly kiss. "Been worried to death, I know. But I couldn't help it. I don't want to play truant, but there's always something turning up."

"I am afraid you have got yourself into serious trouble this time, my son," said the father gravely. "I know all about it. It is here in the paper. I cannot blame you; but it is a bad affair."

"But, what in the world was I to do?" asked Clark, with a comical grimace. "You don't know the whole of it. Does the paper tell how I skated down the ice-hill and fell, and was jerked by this man out of the way of the sleds?"

"There! I knew it was some of your madcap frolics!" cried Helen. "You are always plunging head-foremost into trouble."

"I suppose so. I'm a coon on diving," answered the reckless boy. "And there's not a spark of fun without a spice of danger. Anyhow, this man that the police were after saved me from being sledded over, and I lent him my skates. I wasn't hog enough to refuse him. Well, then, a scaly coon snatched me, and a couple of chaps took me away from him, and ran off with me in the duke's sleigh.—And you can bet high we had a gallus ride!"

He laughed with as much abandon as if he had been safe in America, instead of in the Russian capital.

"It is not so amusing," answered his father sternly. "You do not know what danger you may be in. I must get you out of this country somehow. Where have you been these last two days?"

The boy's face grew suddenly sober. He looked cautiously around before speaking, then approached his father and answered in a low tone:

"Among the Nihilists!"

The father leaped up as if a serpent had stung him. A cry of suppressed terror came from the lips of the sister. If dynamite had exploded in their midst they could not have been more startled.

"And I am one of them," continued the reckless boy. "I couldn't help it. I knew too much. I had to swear a deep oath, or they would have killed me. I am in for it in the worst way."

"Unhappy boy!" cried the father. "What have you done? Do you know the penalty of joining that crew of murderers? You have the emperor and half of Russia for your enemies."

"And the other half for my friends," answered the youth. "You don't know what the Nihilists are, father. They are everywhere. In the army, in the navy, in the courts, among the nobles, even in the emperor's palace. And I have learned how to make myself known for one of them wherever I am. If I have made a million of enemies I have made a million of powerful friends."

"Listen to him!" cried Helen. "You might think he gloried in it!"

"And what have you to do for all this protection?"

"To obey all orders given me."

"I see how it is," cried the father, springing up with decision. "You have got yourself in a terrible danger. You must be got out of this country at once, no matter what the cost."

"Not just yet," came in a hard, stern voice from the door, which at that moment flew open. "He is wanted in Russia just at present."

In walked a uniformed agent of the Russian police. Two others stood in the hall just behind him.

CHAPTER IV.

A MYSTERIOUS AGENT.

More than a week has passed since the date of our last chapter. Clark Cloverly has again disappeared, but this is a disappearance that gives infinite trouble to his father and sister, for they know that he is in the gloomy depths of a Russian prison.

Mr. Cloverly has exerted himself to have his son brought up for a hearing, and has availed himself of the services of the American minister, but as yet without success.

The course of justice does not run smooth in Russia, and it is a bad country to get into a scrape with the Government. What in America would be looked on as a bit of boyish folly was there considered a serious political crime. An aching tooth is not more sensitive than a despotic government.

On an afternoon at the end of this time Helen came in from an out-door expedition. She hastily flung off her fur-lined wraps, her face glowing with anger and vexation.

"I declare that I hate people without souls!" she ejaculated. "And I hate snails! I have been to see the American minister, and you might as well try to move an oak tree. He is bound to go on his own pace, like a forty-year-old horse on a race-course. I despise such men!"

The irate little beauty flung herself down in a chair, and angrily flitted her fan.

"Keep cool, my dear," answered her father quietly. "You are a worse spitfire than Clark. The minister is doing all he can. You cannot hurry affairs in this country. What took you there? You knew I was attending to that."

"Because I got tired of fretting and fuming here. I am terribly worried about poor Clark. They hang men for nothing here; you know that. And they send them to Siberia for less than nothing. I wish I was home in America, where a bird can sing without having to get a passport."

"I wish to Heaven we were all there!" answered her father, with a sigh. "And I shall certainly soon get there if we can once settle this affair. But I fear that will prove difficult."

"I know it! They will hang my poor brother, that's what they will!"

She twirled the fan so nervously that the delicate thing snapped in two, and was flung fretfully aside.

"If they send him to Siberia I will go there with him. Or I'll go after him. They cannot stop me!"

"I am glad you are not a boy," answered Mr. Cloverly, with a grave smile. "If I had two like you and Clark I fear I would have a sorry time.—What is it?" to a servant who had entered.

"A person to see you, sir."

"Ah! a Russian?"

"Yes, sir; a *moujik*."

"Very well. Show him up here. You need not stay, Helen."

"Yes I will!" she answered. "It may be something about Clark."

The next minute the visitor was ushered into the room.

He was a tall, slender fellow, with intelligent countenance and a sharp look in his eyes. He was dressed in the ordinary winter attire of the porters, drivers and laborers of St. Petersburg, namely, a coat of dressed sheepskin with the woolly side turned inward, stout leather boots, with his pantaloons thrust into their wide tops, and a Tartar hat on his reddish hair.

Mr. Cloverly looked at him with an inquiring glance.

"Do you wish to see me?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. I was told that you wanted a trunk carried—" He paused as the sound of the servant's steps vanished in the distance. He looked around him with eager caution. "Are we alone?" he asked in low tones. "Is there any one within hearing?"

"Certainly not," answered the surprised gentleman. "There is no one here but my daughter and myself. What has that to do with carrying a trunk? I want no trunk carried."

"I must see for myself," rejoined the stranger.

He walked to the several doors of the room, opened them, and closely examined the adjoining apartments. He let the doors stand wide open.

"When a man has secret business an open door is better than a closed one," he said. "A Russian *dvornik* at a key-hole is a bird that carries tales. Never trust an unsafe word within hearing of your *dvornik*."

"The *dvornik*; the porter; why?"

"Because all Russian porters are police spies."

"But what do you want? You are dressed like a *moujik*, but you speak like an educated Russian. You are not what you seem."

"It is something about Clark! I know it is!" cried Helen, springing hastily forward. "Let the gentleman speak. We are eager to hear you, sir."

"Please moderate your tones," answered the Russian coldly. "When people conspire they should talk in whispers. The young gentleman is in trouble, but he has powerful friends." His voice sunk very low. "You do not know the society of which he is now a member. It is not the Nihilist. We are not murderers. But we are sworn to free Russia from her chains. I can speak this to you as Americans."

"Yes, yes, we are in sympathy with any honorable effort for liberty. Not with murder. But my boy?"

"He is in danger. He will be condemned."

"No, no! He has done nothing! They cannot condemn him!" cried Helen, fiercely.

"They can do what they wish, young lady," replied the Russian. "He is an American. That is in his favor. But he will be asked where he has been. If he refuses to reveal, it may go hard with him. And he dare not reveal, on peril of his life."

"Clark Cloverly is no coward and no traitor, sir," answered Helen indignantly. "Your

threats would have no influence on him. But if he has given his word he will keep it."

"I believe you," and the speaker looked with admiration into her earnest face. "If we had but an army with your spirit, Russia would soon be free. But I am here in your service. I am here—"

He ceased again, and made another inspection of the adjoining rooms.

"Your brother is safe," he continued in cautious tones. "If the courts condemn him there are those who are pledged to protect him, and who will. You have access to his prison?"

"It has been denied me," answered Mr. Cloverly sadly.

"But they cannot prevent you seeing him before his trial. You are his father. You have a right to insist on it."

"I will do so."

"When you see him hand him this." He gave Mr. Cloverly a small package. "We cannot have access to him except through you, but you can give it to him without suspicion. He must read the inclosed directions carefully, and then utterly destroy them. A scrap of paper in the wrong hands is sometimes as deadly as a bullet."

"But what then? What is this to do?"

"If he is condemned, we will save him. But he must obey our directions implicitly. Good-day. It is not best that I should stay here too long."

He raised his hat with a polite movement, and quickly left the room.

The father and daughter looked at each other in wonder and hopefulness.

"I must confess I do not understand this," said the former. "I am afraid of it."

"You must do as he says," cried the daughter, eagerly. "The man is no police spy. He is honest. I could see it in his eyes."

But we must leave the father and daughter to finish their conversation alone, and to indulge in the hope and dread which their strange visitor left behind him. The flow of events hurry us forward to a point a week later in time, and to a locality far different from the richly adorned residence of the wealthy American. We find ourselves, instead, in the dull, gloomy precincts of a Russian police court, with its bare stone walls and the hard, stern faces of its occupants.

Clark Cloverly is there, arraigned as a criminal before a red-faced judge, but with all his reckless boyish vim of countenance. His father is also present, in company with the dignified American minister, who has consented to personally attend the examination.

As we enter, the preliminary part of the examination is over, rather favorably for the prisoner. There is now on the witness-stand the burly officer who had arrested the youth.

Clark listened quietly while the policeman gave vent to a tissue of open falsehoods, in which he pretended to have overheard the conversation between the youth and Ivan, the escaped criminal. His story made out that the boy was little short of a declared Nihilist. Clark kept silent, though with a peculiar curl of his lip.

The policeman went on to describe what had happened afterward. One would have imagined,

from his story, that the boy was a giant, and he a badly-treated dwarf. The stealing of the duke's sleigh seemed to be more Clark's doings than that of his companions.

"Will your honor permit me to speak?" asked the American minister, rising in the court.

"Certainly, your excellency," the judge affably replied.

"I have listened indignantly to this preposterous evidence," remarked the minister. "This man heard a conversation in the open air when he was a hundred yards distant! And, according to him, he was handled by a mere boy as a man might handle a baby! Shall I have the privilege of questioning the prisoner at the bar?"

"I shall consider it an honor," rejoined the judge.

"Well then, young man, will you please inform the court what you think of this testimony?"

Clark stood upright, and turned a quizzical look on the important witness.

"He's a fair figure of a coon," began the boy, shrugging his shoulders. "About the size of a fat whisky barrel. But there are no barrels big enough to hold his lies. Why, the fellow must think the judge of this court has been brought up on pap. If he had a whole side of leather in each ear—and they aren't much short of it—he couldn't have heard what passed between me and Ivan, as they say that man is named. All I know is *he* hasn't sent home my skates yet."

A smile of amusement passed through the court.

"And about the rest of it! Did you ill-treat him, as he says?"

"Why, I am a little afraid my feet slipped, and kicked his heels from under him. He tumbled like a jackass out of a hay-loft. You ought to have been there!" The reckless boy laughed at the thought.

"The prisoner will conduct himself more decorously," warned the judge, severely.

"All right, your honor," answered Clark, easily. "I didn't go to laugh. It came out itself."

A few more questions thoroughly discredited the evidence of the witness, particularly as Clark was sustained in his story by the evidence of other witness. The discomfited officer stepped down with a hang-dog look.

Mr. Cloverly's face wore a more hopeful expression. A low-toned conversation passed between him and the minister, while the court proceedings continued.

At length the judge raised himself in his seat with an important air.

"We have heard the evidence," he remarked. "It is, so far, not to the disadvantage of the accused. But there is another point to be cleared up. Two days and nights elapsed between the time the prisoner was rescued and his return home. We demand to know where he was during that interval of time."

"I don't know," answered Clark.

"You don't know?" in surprised accents.

"No more than the man in the moon," rejoined the boy. "There's too many twists in your city for me to carry them all in my head."

They took me somewhere, and kept me there. That's all I know about it."

"That is a lame story," was the severe comment. "What kind of place was it? What sort of people were there?"

"It was somewhere in the upper part of a house, and the people were Russians," returned the boy. "I never saw them before, and am not anxious to ever see them again."

"You are concealing something," continued the judge. "You were among conspirators—murdering Nihilists. I demand a complete story of everything that passed, from first to last, and detailed descriptions of everybody and everything you saw."

"You may demand it, but you won't get it," answered the intrepid boy, with a look of indignation. "These people jerked me out of a scrape, and hid me away from danger. And you want me to betray them! Maybe you don't know what sort of stuff Americans are made of, or what kind of blood runs in Yankee veins. Before I'd blow on them that put themselves in danger to help me I'd cut my throat; and if you are not satisfied with that you can cut it for me."

The boy sat angrily down. He had had his say. The face of the judge grew redder than ever, as his cheeks puffed out with wounded dignity.

"The prisoner is remanded," he said. "They that help to conceal criminals are abettors of crime. Remove him from the court."

A short conversation ensued between the Americans and the judge, but the latter held firmly to his purpose.

"The boy is too outspoken," said the minister after they had gained the street. "He might have got off if he had used a little more discretion."

"That is Clark's way," answered the father helplessly. "I can do nothing with him."

"I admire his way, then," rejoined the official, "and I will use my influence with the emperor in his favor. I fancy there will be no difficulty in his release."

Five minutes afterward, as Mr. Cloverly walked on alone, a hand from the passers-by twitched his sleeve. He turned quickly back.

"Did the boy get the paper?" was whispered in his ear.

"Yes. He read and destroyed it."

"Very good. He is safe."

The speaker disappeared in the throng. Mr. Cloverly stood staring back with surprise.

CHAPTER V.

A LEAP FOR LIFE.

THE inside of the Russian prison would be no agreeable place of residence for the coldest-blooded of the Muscovites. For a hot-blooded American boy it was dreadfully aggravating.

Clark walked the length and breadth of his narrow cell like a panther in a cage, pausing now and then to deliver a spiteful kick on the stout oaken door.

"It would be enough to give a blackbird the blues," he growled angrily. "If I'd only had sense enough to hold my tongue before that owl-eyed judge, I might have been safe out of

this. But I never had that much sense, so there's no use crying over spilt milk. Why didn't I cook him up some nice story of where I was those two days; instead of choking him square off? But it's just like me. I can't help blurting out the truth, if I'm choked for it myself."

He continued his panther-like walk for a few minutes. He then seated himself on his low cot, and took something from his pocket, at which he gazed with doubtful eyes. It was a small vial, not larger than a chestnut, which seemed to contain a bluish fluid.

"I'm in for it, I suppose," he remarked. "If they get me out of the clutches of the law, as they promise, I can't go back on them. But how am I going to get the chance to use this, that's the question? I've got to get out of this stone cage first, and there don't seem much show for that."

A step in the corridor attracts his attention. He hastily concealed the vial. The next moment there came the sound of the key in his cell door. The lock clicked harshly, and the door opened, revealing the keeper and a stout uniformed person, who looked like an officer of the army.

This person's face wore a harsh expression as he advanced pompously into the room, and signed to the keeper to withdraw out of hearing.

"So, you young rogue," began he harshly, as he stood bolt upright before the boy, "you are likely to gain nothing by denying the truth before the judge. We have found it all out. You are a Nihilist. The secret is discovered."

"That's very interesting news," answered Clark. "I am obliged for the information. I would never have found it out if you hadn't been kind enough to tell me."

"No bravado, sirrah! I am here on the emperor's service."

"And a jolly old cock you are. But you might have brought a few grains of common-sense in along with you. What do you want, anyhow? If I am a boy, I ain't a fool, and if you've got nothing better in your news-bag you'd better absquatulate."

"We have found it all out. I say," answered the pompous officer. "The Nihilists are threatening the Government on your account. See here. They vow they will blow up this building with dynamite unless you are released!" He waved a sheet of paper in his hand, while he fixed his little twinkling eyes sharply on the prisoner.

"Good for them!" cried Clark, in reckless bravado. "They're just the folks to do it, too, if they promise."

"Then you confess? You acknowledge that you are a member of the gang?"

"Do I? What set that bee buzzing in your bonnet? Look here, old hoss," Clark got up and squared himself defiantly before the officer, "when you go out to buy fools how much do you generally pay? I'd like to know, for I don't intend to be sold for a fool's price. If you've got no better business here I guess I can get along without your company."

The pompous officer swelled with anger at the disrespectful manner of the youthful prisoner.

who seemed to care no more for the dignity of a Russian official than he might have done for the whisking of a rat's tail.

"You are a hardened villain!" he exclaimed. "And little more than a boy! I am horrified!" He held up his hands to express his overcharged feeling.

"It is a pity of you," answered the reckless youth. "You must have took it bad. Quinine might be good for it."

"This interview must come to an end," replied the officer, severely.

"I gave you orders to absquatulate five minutes ago," interrupted Clark.

"I am about to remove you from this prison to a safer one," continued the officer. "This building may not be safe from the terrible Nihilists, but you are about to be immured in a place where we can laugh at their dynamite threats. You will be there under my charge, and you will find that your late insolence will not be profitable to you."

A gleam of hope shot into Clark's countenance, which he immediately suppressed. This action of the authorities was in the exact line of intention of his secret friends. Decision and boldness, with the help of good luck, were now needed to set him free once more. He resumed his former easy impertinence, to hide his secret intention from the officer.

"Glad I'm going to have you along," he remarked. "When the Nihilists blow up your shanty I'd like to have you for company. It'll take a smarter coon than you to discount them chaps, let me tell you that. Say the word. When are we to march?"

"Immediately. The carriage is at the door waiting. You are about to be removed to the State Fortress, beyond the Neva. You will have no Nihilist rats to visit you there, I promise you."

"All right. I'm open for a change," answered Clark, defiantly. "Haven't much baggage to carry, so you can lead off, as quick as you like."

Ten minutes afterward the doors of the police-station lock-up, in which Clark had been confined, opened, and he had once again a view of the free streets. It was a drear prospect, however. The locality was deserted. Snow was heavily descending. The air blew shrill and piercing. There was only one person visible, a man that lounged along on the opposite side of the street. His hand clutched his cap in a peculiar manner. Clark looked at him, as if he recognized a signal in the gesture.

A close carriage, drawn by three stout horses, stood at the door. On the box, beside the coachman, sat a uniformed policeman. Clark shrugged his shoulders. The prospect of escape looked blue. He stepped into the carriage, followed by the officer, who closed the door sharply behind him. The vehicle moved quickly off.

Side by side on the single seat of the carriage sat the officer and his prisoner, the former bolt upright and stern-looking, the latter lounging back and looking out of the carriage window into the thick falling snow.

Clark seemed to have some object in this

close observation. He noticed every turn made by the carriage, and seemed seeking to trace the course they were pursuing. At length his countenance cleared up. All was going right. The carriage had taken the desired direction.

He turned with an aggravating look at his companion, who sat with military stiffness, erect and stern, as if he felt his position to be of immense importance.

"You don't often do this sort of thing?" asked Clark, with an irritating manner.

"What do you mean, sirrah?"

"Carry off boys to the lock-up. Don't seem like a high-toned business for colonels in the Russian army. I suppose you ain't less than a colonel?"

"A Russian officer only knows one duty, to obey orders," was the pompous reply. "And besides, you are looked upon as an important State prisoner."

"Am I?" asked Clark, with a comical look. "Much obliged for the honor, but I calculate I could dispense with it. Guess it ain't often you get a genuine American in your clutches, you seem to crow so much about it. Look out now how you hoe your row. I might play you a Yankee trick yet, like I did that policeman on the ice."

"You are in different hands now, my young friend," rejoined the officer, with a look of importance. "You are not the first desperate young criminal I have had to deal with. You will do well to keep quiet."

He drew a pistol from his pocket, and held it in his hand on his knee, while he looked significantly into Clark's face. The latter turned his eyes away, as if scared at the sight of the weapon, and gazed again through the carriage window. He turned back after a minute, with a look of satisfaction. All was evidently going to his liking.

"Suppose I was to show you one of those Yankee tricks I spoke of?" he remarked, thrusting his hand carelessly into his pocket. "What would you do?"

"Put a bullet through you," came the stern answer. "That's what we call a Russian trick."

"It's Russian against Yankee, then. Square yourself, my cove! I'm going to show you that Yankee trick."

The officer looked into the face of the prisoner, and broke into a disdainful laugh.

"I didn't know that I had to do with a fool," he remarked.

"I did, then," answered Clark sharply, "or I would have taken a different track. Look out, now. Here's the Yankee's trump card."

Before the officer could guess what his prisoner meant, Clark had caught his pistol hand in a firm grasp, and was pressing his other hand on the officer's upper lip. This hand held the small vial of which we have spoken.

The Russian struggled for an instant in the boy's grasp. But as he did so, a peculiar odor from the open vial penetrated his nostrils, and was drawn into his lungs. He gasped for an instant, and then his head fell back, with closed eyes. He ceased to struggle. His hands lay limp and moveless.

Clark continued to press the vial to his nose. A look of desperate energy had replaced the usual reckless expression of his face.

"He shall take it all, if it suffocates him," he muttered between his clinched teeth. "It's life or life now. Good! He is done for. Now for that pistol and a plunge for liberty."

He wrenched the weapon from the rigid hand of the stupefied officer. At the same instant he opened the door of the carriage and looked out.

"I'm safe from him for several minutes," he muttered. "Now for my friends outside. Ha! it's all right! Here goes for freedom!"

At that instant an open, cart-like vehicle had drawn up side by side with the police carriage; so close that their wheels nearly locked. The street was a quiet one. Clark cast a glance at the driver of the vehicle. Something in the appearance of the latter decided him. The next instant the door of the carriage was thrown wide open, and the captive had made his leap for freedom.

The bold spring through the descending snow was successful. The agile youth lit in the open cart, his feet falling noiselessly on the carpet of snow with which its bottom was covered. It was done so quickly and noiselessly that the two men on the box, half-blinded by the snow blast in their faces, failed to notice what had happened.

Clark threw himself prostrate in the bottom of the vehicle, which quickly drew away from the dangerous vicinity of the carriage. Evidently, the whole matter had been prearranged, and the driver knew his part.

For a minute more they continued to drive in the same direction. Then the open vehicle turned into a street that there ran at right angles to the one which they had been pursuing.

At the same moment there came a cry from the interior of the carriage like the bellow of an enraged bull.

"The jig's up," cried Clark to the driver. "The dog's come back to his senses. Let out like streaked lightning. They'll be on our track before you could say Jack Robinson."

In response to this stirring warning the driver fiercely lashed his horses, which dashed madly forward. Onward they tore, while the sounds they had heard still came from behind them.

They had gained a considerable distance in advance when they saw the carriage turn sharply into their street, the coachman yelling to his horses, and using the whip on them with merciless freedom.

A pistol-bullet from the policeman by his side buried itself in the timbers of the cart.

"Dash on!" cried Clark. "He couldn't hit a barn-door at this speed."

Another shot, and the bullet whistled overhead. Clark raised himself on his arm and looked backward. The carriage was evidently gaining.

"There's enough of this sort of fun," cried the daring boy, as he rose to his feet. "If there's going to be artillery practice, I am in for my share of the sport."

He drew the pistol which he had taken from the officer and aimed at the pursuers, just as a third bullet swept by, so closely as to ruffle his hair.

The report was echoed by the discharge of his weapon. In an instant the leading horse of the carriage team stumbled and fell headlong to the ground, the others plunging in a heap upon him.

"Hurra!" yelled Clark, waving his cap wildly. "That's Yankee practice, my lads. Le, out, old chap. We've got the whip hand now."

The plunging horses, the instant after, were turned sharply into another street. The driver drew them partly up.

"Jump!" he cried, in a hoarse voice. "The gateway to the left! This is your place!"

A wild spring brought Clark to the ground. He hurried forward through the gateway mentioned into an open court-yard. The vehicle he had left drove on with its former speed.

A minute or two afterward the pursuing carriage turned with a quick swing into the street. Two horses drew it. The dead animal had been cut out of the traces.

CHAPTER VI.

INSIDE A RUSSIAN HOUSE.

BEFORE proceeding with our story we must say something about the character of a Russian house. The people of St. Petersburg do not usually live in single houses, but in immense apartment houses, each large enough for a considerable number of families. These are of three or four stories above the ground floor, of which all the lower floors are occupied by wealthy families, while the ground floor may serve for kitchens, store-rooms, or even stables.

But these fine families, with their luxurious furniture and their handsome house entrance, know little and care less, of all the inhabitants of their mansion. Above them is a large attic floor, which they never see. It has no connection with the front entrance, but is reached by a rear stairway, and is divided up into a great number of rooms.

This attic floor swarms with life. It has a distinct family for almost every room, and holds all sorts and kinds of people, flung in together, like the happy family in a menagerie. There they live and steam, for a Russian house is kept always roasting hot, and a genuine Russian can stand more heat and more cold than any other individual on the face of the earth.

It was into such a scene as this that Clark Cloverly now hastened. The court-yard into which he had hurried lay in the rear of such a mighty mansion, and from it opened the stairway that led to the attic region of the house.

The snow swirled around his ears as he ran hastily across the open space and the sharp Russian air cut him like a knife. In a moment he plunged through the doorway. The shelter of the hall once gained, he breathed freely for the first time since he had left the prison.

"All jolly so far," he cried, with a laugh of boyish triumph. "If I haven't flung them coons as neat as wax-work then there's no use talking. Bet they don't nab me again so easy."

He hastened up the long flight of stairs. The sharp wind and whirling snow followed him up, for the lower door stood always wide open, alike in summer and winter.

At the head of the stairs were a pair of stout

swinging doors, that closed sharply behind him as he pushed through them. They worked with strong springs, as a defense against the inrush of the cold.

In an instant it seemed to him as if he had suddenly entered another world. The hall in which he stood was as hot as a tropical summer and had a stifling variety of smells. A medley of noises came to his ears, sounds of hammering, frying, scolding, crying, and talking as it seemed in twenty different languages. Clark had a good ear, and he recognized words in English, German, French and Russian with a variety of unknown dialects, all jumbled together.

"You might think it was the Tower of Babel broke loose," he muttered. "Anyhow a chap better be in a squalling pig-pen than in the neatest prison that was ever got up. Now, just let me tumble down on Ivan."

The place in which he stood was a long hall, upon which opened the doors of numerous apartments. At intervals other halls branched out from it, also lined on both sides with rooms. People seemed crowded in here like cows in a stable, this one floor holding three times as many families as the whole house below.

Clark slowly made his way along, observing closely as he went. He asked no questions, and was evidently moving under strict directions. At length he stopped before a door in a remote corner of the building.

"This must be the place," he muttered, as he announced his presence by a peculiar knock.

The door was immediately opened, and there appeared a face which Clark at once recognized. It was that of Ivan Stretzlitz, the fugitive whom he had aided to escape.

The latter sprang hastily forward, his eyes beaming with satisfaction. He caught Clark in his arms with a hug like that of a Russian bear, and drew him hastily into the room.

"Brave fellow!" he cried, in a low but intense tone. "You have escaped! I knew it was in you to do it, but I feared some accident. One is never sure. Mercy, but won't the police go wild! Brave, noble soul; you have made friends who will never desert you."

He shook Clark's hands as if he wished to wring them off. He seemed half beside himself with joy.

"I flung them neat, you bet," answered Clark easily. "But just suppose you let up on that. I ain't made of cast iron; and my arms ain't rigged for pump-handles. Squat down, and we'll have it out in talk."

"Lower. Speak lower," warned Ivan. "There are ears about. Never breathe a secret louder than a whisper in a Russian house."

"There are more tongues than ears, I fancy," rejoined Clark, with a grimace. "Anyhow, by the noise outside, you might think everybody were using their tongues, and nobody their ears. Why, you could cut the noise down in slices. I don't believe them chaps could hear thunder."

He seated himself on a chair which Ivan offered him, and looked curiously about the room. It was an apartment of no great size, and very sparsely furnished. Several other persons

were present, an old woman, and a couple of men, who now came forward and shook hands with Clark, congratulating him on his escape. They were men of earnest, determined faces, whom he had evidently seen before.

Ivan bustled about, setting the materials of an abundant meal before the youth, whom he seemed to think must be in a state of starvation. He also prepared a pot of steaming-hot tea, one of the chief necessities of life to a Russian, and which they drink at a heat which would scorch the skin from the throat of any other Christian.

Clark was, in fact, hungry enough to do justice to the provender set before him, and as he ate he told the story of his adventures. More than once he half-choked himself with laughing at the pompous idiocy of the officer, and the way he had played him off. His audience seemed to think the story irresistibly funny, and laughed as if they would split their sides at Clark's narration.

"It's lucky for me they picked out such a confounded fool to do the work," he remarked. "Talk about a jackass being stupid! Why, a whole team of them wouldn't be a match for him. And didn't I play him? But it was just as easy as fishing for gudgeons."

"Gudgeons? What are they?" asked Ivan.

"They are a sort of fish that you want no bait for. They bite the bare hook, just as the tony officer did."

Clark pushed his chair back from the table, quite satisfied.

"I ought to be good for another day," he remarked. "And now, what's in the wind?"

A long, low conversation ensued, in which the situation of the escaped prisoner was thoroughly discussed. It was evident that he must keep in hiding for the present. And it was quite as evident to Clark that his new friends intended to make use of him. He had joined a society into which entrance was easier than escape.

He could not stay where he now was. The *dvornik*, or porter of the house, was well known to be a police spy. The bold escape would soon be known over all St. Petersburg. The appearance of a strange youth in the mansion would at once excite suspicion.

"I might keep you in close quarters here, but there is always danger of your being seen," remarked Ivan. "We have much safer places than this. You must be got away from here under cover of the night."

"All prime," answered the boy, with an air of recklessness. "Any port in a storm. This is a gay joke for nothing but the loan of a pair of skates. But it's confounded hard to have to crawl about in rat-holes while all this good skating is going. I'll have a fling yet before many days, you bet, in spite of all the police of this city."

"You may have a chance," answered Ivan, with an air of mystery. "The Free Russians have work for their members. Since you have taken the oath of membership you must obey all orders, whatever the peril."

"Suppose I don't choose to," answered Clark, with a rebellious feeling.

"Then it will be knife, rope or poison," an

swered one of the other men sternly. "Fidelity, obedience, or death—that is the motto of our order."

Clark shrugged his shoulders but made no reply.

Night fell early in the December of that high latitude. By the time of our winter twilight it had been there an hour dark. Yet it was nine o'clock in the evening ere the word was given to the escaped prisoner that it was now time to put their enterprise into effect.

One of the party leading the way to see that the coast was clear, they descended the long flight of stairs, and emerged into the open courtyard. The snow was still falling. A cold wind drove it into their faces. Clark shivered in the biting air, which his Russian friends did not seem to mind in the least. But a Russian has wonderful powers of enduring cold. It is said that a peasant will think nothing of sleeping on a snowbank with the temperature below zero. They will even leave a steaming vapor bath and take a roll in the snow. As the proverb goes among them, "What is death to a German is health to a Russian."

But Clark had none of that iron temperament, and he shivered and drew his fur collar up over his face as he entered the sleigh which stood in the court-yard.

"It is no great distance," said one of the men, looking at their shivering comrade.

"Thank the stars for that," answered Clark. "This is about the wildest night I ever saw in your nipping climate. I bet a camel it is a hundred and fifty below zero. A night like this would freeze the nose off a brass monkey."

He clasped his own, to make sure if it was still on his face.

The sleigh had now turned into the street and was driving furiously onward. It was alone in the retired streets which they followed. No other vehicle was met. The night was too wild for even a Russian to venture out without pressing business.

A fifteen minutes' rapid drive brought them to their destination. So far as the darkness and the snow permitted vision it seemed to be a house of moderate proportions in the suburbs of the city. There was a street lamp at some distance, but here all was gloom.

Ivan and one of the two men sprung from the sleigh, leaving the horses in charge of the other. Clark followed them, dancing on the pavement to restore circulation to his limbs.

"Ten minutes more of that and I'd been a mummy," he cried. "I never knew what cold was before. Streak on like fun before I freeze stiff. A stove is worth ten gold mines now."

A peculiar knock on the house door was answered, not by the opening of the door, but by another knock from within. Ivan followed it up with a second signal. The door now slightly opened and some whispered words passed. Finally the door was flung open.

"Enter, brothers," cried the door-keeper.

One of the men remained with the sleigh. The others entered. The door-keeper cast a suspicious glance on Clark, but his face cleared up when the latter gave him the signal of membership.

"A new brother," exclaimed Ivan. "Is the chapter called?"

"Yes. You are waited for."

Ivan proceeded. He led to a room on the second floor, whose door he opened.

"I must leave you here for the present," he said to Clark. "You are secure here from pursuit. A meeting of our brothers takes place to-night. I dare not take you to it. Business of great importance is to be discussed by the higher members of the society, to which the younger members cannot be admitted. Hold yourself in readiness for work. It is our rule to try the courage and ability of every new member. And now, good-night."

Clark was left alone. Ten minutes afterward Ivan gave the signal of entrance on the door of a secluded apartment in the subterranean region of the house.

The door was opened. A dim light shone from within. A long, low room appeared, about which were ranged a score of men, their faces hidden by black masks. On a dais at the upper end of the hall sat a stalwart figure, of whom only a pair of glittering eyes were visible. He held in his hand, as symbol of authority, a human skull.

The door closed. The chapter of the conspirators was completed.

CHAPTER VII.

A WILD RACE.

THE morning sun shone on a striking scene. St. Petersburg was an ocean of snow. The storm of the night before had poured down its white flakes for long hours, until the streets were knee-deep in their chilly blanket. The sky was now clear, but the sunbeams seemed icy cold. They made no impression on the white blanket that covered the city.

In the room in which Clark had been left the night before there were now three persons, Clark Cloverly, Ivan Stretzlitz, and a tall, handsome woman. It was Sophie Peroffskaya, destined ere long to suffer death for her deeds. The remainder of the conspirators had faded away, one by one, into the stormy night. No trace of the treasonable meeting remained.

Clark was angrily walking the floor, with an expression of hot vexation on his face.

"I don't see any use in my playing the rat in the hole," he declared. "I don't believe half that you tell me. And if it is all true it is nothing to me!"

"You should have thought of that before you took the oath of the Free Russians," said the woman, coldly.

"I took it with a rope around my neck," answered Clark.

"And if you don't keep it you will find the other end of the rope knotted to a tree."

"It seems to me that I am swinging between two ropes," rejoined Clark. "The police have got one around my neck, and you the other. It is an odd chance if I don't get choked on one side or the other."

"You need not fear," replied Ivan. "The Free Russians are able to protect you. You do not know the order you have joined. I tell you that all Russia is undermined. We are every-

where. In the palace, the army, the court, and the hut. No one knows or suspects us. We strike and disappear. Death or exile have no terrors for us. Liberty is worth every risk. We are sworn to win the freedom of Russia, or to perish in the effort."

Clark heard with interest the story of this mighty secret organization that, like a great tree, sent its roots everywhere underground throughout Russian society. It was like a huge mine, with which the whole nation was mined, and which might at any moment explode, and blow up the whole organization. The mystery of it allured him, and he felt a sensation of pride that he had become a member of such a mighty secret brotherhood of patriots.

"I must do one thing or the other," he cried impatiently. "I am not ready to stay here and rust. Give me something to do. I don't care if there is danger in it, if there is only life."

Sophie looked at him with an expression of pleasure. This was a spirit like her own.

"You shall be taken at your word," she said. "The chapter has chosen you for a dangerous and important duty. It may be an hour, or it may be a week, before the word to act comes to you. But there is a service of danger that needs a person of your dash and boldness. You shall show if you are as daring as you seem."

"There is no murder in it? If there is, count me out."

"No, no. I have told you we are not Nihilists. We have other objects in view," was the hasty reply. Sophie seemed a little disturbed by his question.

"And what are those objects?"

"We have already told you all you are yet to know. Our secrets are not told all at once to new members. Hold yourself in readiness for a dangerous service. The word may come to you by night or by day, in sleep or in waking. Whenever it comes, or wherever, you must on the instant obey, without question. Truth, honor, and silent obedience, such is our motto. Farewell."

With a stately step she left the room, leaving Clark and Ivan together.

Three days passed away, during which this involuntary imprisonment continued. Clark chafed at the restraint. His young blood was full of fire, and, as he said, he would sooner dare any danger than rust. He must be doing.

At the end of that time there came a mysterious message, of which he only clearly understood one point.

"If you are taken with this upon you, you will be hung. If you fail in your duty you will be shot. Courage, daring and obedience. Keep the heart of a lion in the skin of a lamb."

"In the hide of a jackass, I've a notion," growled the discontented youth. "However it is work. That's what I'm hot for. And the deuce take the danger!"

A sleigh stood at the door, a heavily built, strong affair, drawn by three powerful horses, harnessed side by side, the center horse in the shaft, the outside horses running free. Over the neck of the shaft horse curved a wide wooden bow, from which depended a peal of bells.

There was a long, cold ride before the traveler, and he was dressed in a thick fur-lined cloak, so

long that it completely covered all his other garments. The collar closely enveloped his neck. Down over his ears and cheeks came the furred flaps of his hat. Of all his body only the eyes, nose and mouth were visible.

"He'll need sharp eyes that makes me out now," cried the reckless boy as he stepped gayly into the sleigh. "There's not as much of me in sight as you could cover with your fingers. The chap that buys me now has got to do it by sample. Good-by. Trust me to put the job through."

In a moment more he had grasped the reins, and touched the leader with the long-lashed whip. Off went the mettled steeds with a bound. Like a meteor dashed the sleigh through the wide street. The sleighing was fine. The air was exhilarating. The horses were fresh and ardent. Their driver was wild with the touch of the keen winter air.

"Go it, my beauties!" he cried. "Let out! Show your paces! Down to your work, lovely! This is prime fun!"

The long lash again touched the leader. The mettlesome horse sprang wildly forward. Every vehicle on the street was soon distanced by the dashing sleigh with its reckless occupant.

His instructions had been to keep strictly to the retired streets and avoid the main avenues. But the racing instinct was too strong in him to be repressed. The rushing team was turned toward the Nefski Prospect and quickly rounded into that street, with its hundreds of vehicles.

Carts, carriages, sleighs, cabs, vehicles of every conceivable pattern crowded the wide avenue. The snow was smooth and the sleighing prime, and the whole city seemed to be on the street and the wide pavement enjoying the pleasures of a winter day.

Clark guided his horses skillfully in and out through the maze of vehicles. He was a good driver, and managed to avoid the collisions which his speed threatened. He was not alone in his racing speed. Dozens of sleighs dashed forward at a breakneck pace.

One of these overlapped him. It was drawn by a pair of iron-gray horses. Within sat a richly-dressed man, who looked like a noble. Clark cast his eyes back. As he did so he caught a peculiar signal from the seeming nobleman that made him start as if he had been touched by electricity. It was the signal of the Free Russians.

For the moment the wild boy had utterly forgotten his mission and his danger. It came back to him like a flash by this sign. The talking fingers of the noble gave another signal, which Clark recognized as the danger warning. The iron grays pushed on. A look of stern threat was in the eyes of the noble driver as he fixed them on the confused face of the youthful agent of the conspirators.

Clark drew up his horses to a soberer pace. This incident had told him of what he had been assured, that the society of Free Russians were everywhere, and that he could not move without coming into contact with them. And their system of signals was so complete that they could keep up a conversation almost without a word.

The young driver was now as eager to get off

the fashionable drive as he had recently been to enter it. For the first time he recognized his danger. If friends were so thick around him, foes might be also. He was known to many of the police. Perhaps a description of him had been published. He might be recognized at any moment, despite the fact that only his eyes, nose, and mouth were visible.

His efforts to turn off the Nefski were unfortunate. His sleigh got into a knot of carts and carriages, and in striving to extricate itself, came plump upon another sleigh. For the instant it looked as if there would be a crash. A cry of alarm in a woman's voice attracted Clark's attention. It was followed by an exclamation in another tone.

"Clark! It is Clark!"

He had by this time extricated his sleigh, and looked eagerly around. There stood his sister Helen, half-upright in the opposing sleigh, her face eager with excitement, her arms outstretched toward her wayward brother.

"Helen!" he cried. "I didn't expect such good luck. It's all right, Helen. Don't be troubled about me."

"It is not all right," she huskily replied. "You do not know the danger you are in; your description has been published everywhere. Back to your hiding-place and stay there till we can make arrangements for your escape from the country."

This conversation had been in English. The occupants of passing sleighs turned and looked back upon the speakers. Clark reined his team short around toward a neighboring street.

"Good-by, sister," he cried. "I am all right. Don't be troubled about me. Tell father he can trust his boy to do nothing mean."

The prancing horses plunged wildly onward. Yet a last shrill note of alarm from Helen reached her brother's ears.

"Beware!" she cried. "That officer on the sidewalk seems to recognize you! You are in peril!"

Clark looked in the direction indicated. There stood no less a personage than the official from whose custody he had so recently escaped. The man was gesticulating wildly and pointing to the youthful driver, while hoarse cries of anger, alarm, and warning came from his lips.

"It's neck or nothing now in good earnest," ejaculated the boy. "Nip or tuck's the game. The best horses and the longest whip will win."

As he spoke, his own lash descended shrewdly on his horses. Instead of entering the side street, as he had intended, he turned back into the Nefski, and drove furiously onward.

Speed was needed. The officer had sprung into a passing sleigh. A sharp pursuit was at once inaugurated. Down the wide street dashed pursued and pursuer, threading in and out among the crowded vehicles. At every moment it seemed as if there would be a collision, yet at every moment the sleighs swung free. On they went at a thundering pace, both sides using the whip freely, while all eyes were bent on them with surprise and interest.

The pursuing officer continued to yell in hoarse tones:

"It is the young Nihilist! It is the escaped

prisoner! Stop him! Arrest him! On your allegiance to the emperor!"

Evidently the pursuing horses were the better travelers, or were handled by one who understood better the art of winding through a crowd of vehicles. Clark continued to press his steeds, but momentarily the chasing party came nearer. The boy's face was set with anxiety. He remembered the dangerous document he bore.

Suddenly he passed the nobleman's sleigh drawn by the iron-grays. It was moving in the opposite direction. Clark again caught a signal from the occupant as it passed. It meant assurance of aid. He waited with strained senses for the purpose of his secret friend.

It came in a thundering crash. The sleigh of the nobleman had collided with that of the pursuers. There sounded the splintering of wood. The occupants of the overturned sleigh were dashed out helplessly on the snow.

A laugh of hope and triumph came from Clark's lips as he drove furiously on.

CHAPTER VIII.

A HOT CHASE.

CLARK was shrewd enough to know that there was not an instant to lose. The alarm would be quickly spread. Before a minute new pursuers might be on his track.

He turned his plunging horses quickly off the main street into a side avenue. Time and speed were now necessary for safety, and the Nefski was too densely crowded. The horses were dashing forward at a breakneck pace, but the wild-blooded driver still plied the whip. Standing upright in the sleigh, and grasping the reins with both hands, a cry like an Indian war-whoop came from his lips as the rustling winter air whistled through his flowing locks.

"Come on, you lazy beggars!" he shouted, defiantly. "Let out! You can't catch this team by crawling, nary time! Pile in, for it ain't no baby-play now."

Ten minutes of this furious driving brought him to one of the gates of the city. No one can leave St. Petersburg without inspection by the authorities, and Clark drew shortly up, knowing well that he had a serious peril before him. If recognized now, it was all up with his scheme.

Other vehicles were moving about. Peculiar sounds came from far behind him. They meant nothing to the officials. They meant much to the fugitive. He took them to indicate renewed and sharp pursuit.

A keen-faced officer stepped out as the sleigh drew up at the barrier. He looked doubtfully at the youth.

"Which way?" he asked. "Whither are you driving?"

"Only for an out-of-town run," answered Clark, indifferently. "To Varovitch and back. Quick! My horses are hot. I don't want them to chill off."

"You are no Russian," remarked the officer, with a suspicious glance.

"What has that got to do with it?" cried Clark, impatiently. "Here is my passport. I've a notion you will find it all right."

He handed the officer a paper with which he had been provided by his new friends. Though outwardly calm, he was inwardly fuming with

excitement. The sounds behind him were growing louder every moment. He bit his lips with impatience as the officer slowly opened and perused the document.

"Well?" cried Clark. "It is all right, isn't it? Lord! do you want me to go to sleep here while you're reading?"

"It seems all right," answered the officer. "But—" he looked again with growing suspicion at the boy.

At this moment another sleigh stopped sharply at the gate. Its occupant, a handsome man, dressed richly in furs, and with an air of authority, sprung out and took, without ceremony, the passport from the hands of the officer. He cast his eyes over it hastily.

"That is all right," he sharply said. "Here, sir." He returned it to Clark. "Open the gate, officer. I am in haste."

The officer hastened to comply. This was evidently a person in authority. Yet as the man's back was turned Clark caught from the new-comer the secret sign of the Free Russians. A sense of wonder filled his mind. They had claimed to be everywhere, in all ranks of society. This seemed no idle boast.

"I have been warned to be vigilant," exclaimed the officer, as he flung open the barrier. "This youth is not unlike the description of the escaped prisoner."

"I know him. He is all right. Make way there."

At this instant two sleighs dashed into the avenue leading to the gate. They were yet some distance away, but were driving at furious speed, and yelling with all the power of their lungs. It was impossible as yet to make out the meaning of their cries.

"A race," said the high official, as he drove side by side with Clark through the open gateway. "Shut the gates. Demand their passports. It may be the prisoner trying to escape under the guise of a race."

"Ay! ay!" answered the officer. The gates clanged to in the face of the racing pursuers.

"Now," remarked the official, turning with a smile to Clark. "I have given you a fair start. Make the most of it. There is blood in your horses. They will not be easily run down."

Fierce, excited cries came from beyond the gate as Clark gave the whip to his animals.

"Dolt! Fool! Idiot! You have let the Nihilist escape! Open instantly! On your allegiance to the emperor, open!"

"What do you mean, fellows?" answered the angry officer. "Your authority! No one passes this gate to-day without credentials."

Clark was already at full speed, driving along a straight, clean stretch of road, as smooth as a skating park. The sleigh bounded like a feather behind his keen-spirited horses. A cry of exultation broke from his lips.

"Catch me who can!" he yelled. "Farewell, sir. Thank you for your aid. I and my horses will do the balance."

The official waved his hand in farewell as he turned his horses into a side road. Clark drove on at railroad speed down the snow-crested avenue. His pursuers had not yet passed the gate. Every second was precious.

"Go it, my hearties! Go it, you beggars!" he cried cheerily to the horses. They seemed to understand him, and stepped out at a free run that took them forward with wonderful speed.

Sounds of excited voices yet came from behind the barrier. The intense excitement of the pursuers had, in fact, hindered their progress. The angered officer, who did not half understand them, became aggravatingly deliberate. When at length he opened the gate Clark was a full half-mile in advance.

The city lay behind him. On each side stretched the level fields, now covered deep in snow. At a distance was the river, its icy surface swept clean of snow by the winds. Before him lay the broad high-road, leading outward as straight as an arrow. Behind him came the pursuers, lashing their horses madly, and tearing onward as on a race-course.

It was a question of speed and bottom. Clark looked carefully around, as he handled the ribbons skillfully.

"A stern chase is a long one," he critically remarked. "Your horses have more weight to pull than mine, that's one point gained. I've got a half-mile start, that's another. And if you make many bursts like this you will wear the animals out before you've gone five miles. Wonder if I hadn't best play with them a little and coax them on."

He drew his horses up to a soberer pace as he spoke. He glided at a swinging trot along the avenue, while the pursuers came on at a dead run.

"Jolly for me," laughed the shrewd fugitive as he measured the distance with his eye. "There's nothing like playing your gudgeons. They are gaining on me and it sets them wild. Pelt on the whip, my hearties! Make your critters dig. Bet you high I show you a Yankee trick before you are an hour older."

The road was almost deserted. Here and there a cart loaded with wood or a lumbering provision wagon passed by, bound cityward. But there were no light vehicles from which the pursuers could obtain a relay of horses. Only here and there a low frame dwelling appeared. The road was as uninhabited as if it had been ten miles from the city.

An hour passed away. Clark had kept his horses at a swift pace, but not at the killing speed of his pursuers. He had purposely let them gain on him. The half-mile of his start was now reduced to less than a hundred yards. Cries of triumph came from the chasing sleighs which still sped swiftly on, side by side.

Clark looked critically back. The horses of his pursuers were evidently laboring. They had been overdriven. His own animals yet pulled freely on the reins.

He still held them in, however. The excited pursuers lashed their horses more violently.

"Stop, you dog! Stop, you Nihilist villain!" came the hoarse command. "Draw up, you cannot escape!"

"Suppose you come and catch me," retorted Clark.

"You fly in vain! We will have you in five minutes more!"

"Will you, sweethearts? Did you ever try to catch a weasel asleep? Don't have many genuine Yankees about these parts I guess."

"We will have one less when we have done with you."

Hardly a hundred feet now separated the sleighs.

"You've got to catch your fox before you can wear his brush," answered the tantalizing boy. "Good-by! I don't like your company. Give my respects to your emperor, and turn back before you take cold."

He loosened the tight rein he had kept on his horses. They sprung forward with renewed speed. An encouraging chirrup from his lips and the mettled animals settled down in earnest to their work.

The object of the shrewd boy was quickly evident. His horses were still fresh. Those of his pursuers were overtaxed. They had been driven beyond their powers. Quickly the space between them widened.

Clark's horses had been well chosen. They were full of blood and fire. Though they had already been driven a long distance they were fresh and full of vim. They settled down to their work in a fashion that opened the eyes of the overconfident pursuers.

The latter lashed their wearied horses more violently than ever. Cries of rage came from their lips as the irritating laugh of the reckless boy met their ears. They were overladen with three men to each sleigh, and the distance between pursued and pursuers began to increase as rapidly as it had diminished.

"Stop, or we'll wing you with a bullet!" came the threat.

"Much obliged for the warning," answered Clark, as he crouched behind the high back of his sleigh. "Fire and be hanged! Bet you a hat you can't fetch down this bird on the wing."

A rattling fusilade succeeded. Bullets flew wildly about. It was impossible to take aim from a plunging sleigh, and the boy might have stood erect in perfect safety.

He saw this, and sprung upright on the seat, waving his whip defiantly in the air.

"Farewell! Any word for Moscow? I am bound straight there."

The road still stretched straight outward, with its white glittering surface brilliant in the winter sunlight.

On, on, on, mile after mile. The pursuers fell more and more behind. The vigorous steeds of the fugitive shot more rapidly onward. A quarter-mile divided them. Ere long it was stretched to a half-mile. Clark had regained his start. The horses of the pursuers, worn out with their terrible work, fell into a lagging trot from which no use of the whip could arouse them.

A wild cry of triumph broke from the boy's lips as he again looked back. His pursuers had drawn up and given up the chase in despair.

"Hurrah for our side!" he yelled, as he dashed at swinging speed through a roadside village. "The beggars are discounted. Now, if they don't head me off by telegraph, I can laugh at pursuit."

He pushed on with unabated speed, casting a

doubtful glance on the brace of telegraph wires that ran beside the road he followed

CHAPTER IX.

THE BEST SKATER WINS.

THE day was growing old when Clark at length drove into a large village, which extended in a long line of houses on both sides of the road. These were the low frame buildings of the Russian peasants. But about the center of the village was a large edifice, the posting station, for this was a post village.

He drew up his horses to a slow pace as he approached, not without doubt, for that dangerous brace of telegraph wires still ran onward above his head. But his horses had been driven long and hard. It was impossible for him to go much further without a relay, or halt for rest. He drew up doubtfully, keenly observing the persons who stood in front of the posting-house.

There was a group of these, a half-dozen in all, while not far off was a knot of lounging peasants, who watched with idle curiosity the approaching sleigh.

Clark brought his smoking horses to a halt. He held the reins lightly in his hand as he spoke to the official, a person in uniform, with a stolid face, and a huge military mustache.

"I would like a relay of horses," said Clark, briskly. "And quick, if you please. I wish to make another stage before night."

The official looked at him with an odd expression.

"I will have the horses here directly," he remarked. "They are at the other end of the village. Those creatures of yours look blown. You have driven hard."

"A little of a burst," returned Clark. "Make haste, if you please."

"Certainly. How far have you come, if I may ask?"

"I don't know what all this has to do with giving me a change of horses," answered the suspicious young man. "Send for the horses first, and ask your questions afterward."

"You are from St. Petersburg?"

"I see there is no chance for business here," cried Clark, sharply. "I must drive these animals another stage. Good-by."

He gave his horses the rein. They stepped out again. But ere they had taken three steps several of the bystanders, at a signal from the official, sprung to their heads.

Clark saw the movement and used the whip, but he was too late. A strong hand was at the bit of each horse. They plunged violently under the lash, but were held too firmly to escape.

"What does this outrage mean?" he cried, indignantly. "Loose those horses, or I'll make you sweat for this!"

"I fancy not," answered the official, with a grin. "You have done it well, young man; but in Russia it is not easy to play with the authorities."

"I don't know what you mean," rejoined Clark. He stooped over in the sleigh, as if he was reaching for something on its bottom.

"No violence, my man," cried the official.

"If you know when you are well off I would advise you not to draw a weapon."

"Then release those horses," exclaimed Clark, sharply, as he continued to bend over, and busy himself about his feet. "How dare you stop me on the high-road?"

"By authority of the emperor," returned the stolid official. "You are known, my man. You cannot escape. Fast as you drove, there is something that travels faster." He pointed to the telegraph wires. "I have here an order for your arrest, so I would advise you to submit quietly."

"An order for my arrest?" repeated Clark, still fumbling about his feet, while his eyes keenly ran over the surrounding landscape.

The village lay almost on the banks of the Neva, whose frozen surface was visible, not far to the left.

"Remove those horses," cried the officer, in a commanding tone to his attendants. "You will go no further to-day, my young friend. You have played your part well, but you are not dealing with children. Come, sir, your game is ended. You are my prisoner."

Clark raised himself in the sleigh, and stepped awkwardly out. He seemed to walk with difficulty as he moved through the broken snow toward where the official stood. At that point the snow presented a hard, smooth, frozen surface, running off toward the river bank.

"There is some mistake here, I tell you," declared Clark. "I demand to see your warrant."

The official drew from his pocket a slip of paper in the form of a telegraph message. Clark approached, and leaned forward, as if to read it.

"I am not acting without authority," declared the official. "Here is my warrant, and you are—" He laid his hand significantly on the young man's shoulder.

But the sentence was not finished. For at that instant, much to the official's surprise, he suddenly lost his footing on the slippery snow, and went sprawling down on all fours, while, with a provoking laugh, Clark glided swiftly away.

It was plain now. He had had skates in the sleigh. These he had taken advantage of the conversation to slip quietly on. A tripping touch from his foot had upset the unwary official. Away shot the laughing youth over the frozen snow, beyond the reach of his would-be captors.

"As long as you won't give me horses, I will make the next stage on skates," he cried back. "And I'd advise you the next time you have a bird to cage, to clip his wings first."

The fallen official quickly scrambled to his feet, with a cry of rage and alarm.

"Stop!" he yelled. "Hold fast, rascal! It will go the worse with you! After him! Bring the dog back to me!"

"Go soak your head, Johnny," answered the irritating fugitive, as he glided easily forward. "There's not enough brains there to handle this coon. Good-by."

He had reached the edge of the frozen river. His skates struck the ice with a ringing clang. Some of the Russians were running wildly after

him. Two or three of the peasants, with more sense, had rushed into their houses, and came out provided with skates. These they hastened to put on, while the official danced with rage.

"Bring him back," he cried to these men. "You are the best skaters in the village. Bring the hound back and it will be worth a year's work to you."

Clark was already darting with a free, smooth, graceful movement along the ice-bound river. By the time the peasants had strapped on their old-fashioned skates, and put themselves in pursuit, he had gained a good start.

He was very well satisfied, however, that he was not going to escape without a brush, and was neither surprised or alarmed when he saw his three pursuers skating over the snow toward the river side.

"Maybe you'll bring me back, but I've a notion you won't," said the daring boy. "You've got to catch your weasel first, my lads. And then you've got to hold him, which is worse than catching him."

The sharp wind had swept the center of the river clear of snow. The ice was, in many places, of glassy smoothness. Clark was a skillful skater, and was as fresh as a bird. On he sped, with arrowy fleetness, enjoying the sport as highly as if no group of sleuth-hounds were on his track.

The peasant pursuers were his equals in skill. They came after him at a rapid pace, side by side. The fugitive had gained a fair start, but the chase promised to be hot and long. It soon appeared that there was little difference in skill and speed. The question became one of endurance. In this game the trained muscles of the peasants might be expected to win over those of a mere youth.

Not a word was spoken. Deep silence was preserved by both fugitive and pursuers. The clinking sounds of the skates on the ice alone broke the silence of the air. The sharp frost cut like a razor as they drove through it. The very breath congealed on their faces in the keen cold.

The scene around was a striking wintry landscape. Far as the eye could reach the country was flat as a floor, and covered with an unending sheet of snow. The sky was clear, and the rays of the sun, now low in the west, shone with blinding radiance. The only break to the gleaming whiteness was in the line of the river, where the ice was steel-blue in color, save where it was shrouded in snow.

At some distance ahead, however, there was a change of another character. A pine forest made its appearance, stretching on both sides of the river. But it seemed a forest in white, instead of green, for the evergreen foliage was weighed down with masses of snow.

Straight as an arrow Clark kept on. The village was now left several miles behind. Ten minutes more and he entered the forest, through whose mid the river ran. It was darker here, but the cold was not so intense, as the clustered trees broke the force of the wind.

Behind him came the pursuers with unflagging persistence. But a change had taken place. Instead of moving side by side, they were now spread out in a line. They were not

of equal speed, and one of them was a hundred yards in advance of his comrades.

It was evident, indeed, that this fellow was gaining on the fugitive, while the others were slowly losing. Clark measured the distance keenly with his eye. A knowing smile came to his lips as he turned forward again.

"Look out the weasel don't bite," he muttered.

For a half-hour more the chase continued.

At the end of that time there was a marked change in the situation. The foremost peasant was not ten yards behind the fugitive. The others were more than a quarter-mile in the rear.

Clark looked around and the same odd smile came to his lips, as the peasant harshly ordered him to stop. He slackened his pace, as if worn out with the long flight. The pursuer came up, foot by foot.

"There's no use, my lad," he cried. "You've made a bold dash of it, but you didn't know who was after you. Give it up, now. The game is over."

He was near enough to touch the collar of Clark's cloak. Suddenly the latter swept around, with a long curve, and faced his pursuer.

"You're a smart chap," he exclaimed, "but there's such a thing as catching a Tartar. Look out that it isn't you that's caught."

"What do you mean?" faltered the surprised peasant.

"Only that I hold the winning card in the game. And here it is." The shining muzzle of a revolver flashed in the eyes of the alarmed Russian.

"Down with you and take off one of your skates instanter! Quick, if you want to get home alive! My fingers are cold, and this plaything might go off! Down I say, or by the great American eagle—"

The Russian hastened to comply. There was no mistaking the tone of the fugitive. He meant all he said.

The crestfallen peasant knelt on the ice, and began slowly to remove the skate. He was evidently protracting the operation, in the hope that his companions might come up. But Clark was not in the mood to be played with.

He drew a knife from his pocket, and opened the blade.

"Hold still a minute, my charmer, and I'll help you with those straps," he cried.

In a moment he drew the sharp blade across the leather skate fastenings. The loosened skate fell with a clink to the ice.

"There," laughed the triumphant youth, as he sprung upright again. "I intended to take one of your skates, and leave you the other to get home on. But you can keep them both. I don't think you will run down this coon with a cut strap. Good-by, and a lively journey."

Away he went, with a malicious laugh. The Russian rose with a harsh oath. He could have murdered the boy with a good will at that moment. But there was no help for it. The chase was over. The fugitive had triumphed.

Clark looked back. The three Russians were clustered together. He looked ahead. The sink-

ing sun was on the horizon. He examined the forest with an attentive eye.

"On the opposite side of this wood," he said to himself. "So my instructions ran. I hope I may strike it before dark, for this is an awkward situation. A chap might easily freeze to death in the night."

He skated rapidly onward, keeping a vigilant eye ahead.

CHAPTER X.

TRACKED BY WOLVES.

THE sun had sunk below the horizon. The dark night of a Russian winter was rapidly falling. Only the white of the snow yet lent a little light to the landscape. Clark looked anxiously around him. It was not safe or pleasant to be caught by the night in such a situation, with no sign of a place of shelter. Only a Russian peasant could live through such a night. He must find a refuge, or perish of the biting cold.

Suddenly it grew lighter ahead. He looked forward eagerly, and then a cry of delight burst from his lips. It was the end of the forest. Its gloomy shadows were replaced by the clearer glow of the open country beyond.

With renewed vigor the skater darted onward. In a few minutes he swept beyond the circle of trees, and saw outstretched before him the white level of the snow-bound fields.

"Hurrah!" he shouted, in exultation. "It's all gorgeous now. On the left bank of the river, just back from the forest. So said Ivan. And there it is. Yonder flashes the beacon light."

The gleam of a friendly lamp had caught his eye through the gathering gloom. He could make out a dark mass on the light snow. A few minutes more, and it took the form of a clump of buildings.

With a glad heart he skated thither. He was saved from the deadly prospect of a night on the frozen river.

Within ten minutes Clark was hammering lustily at the door of a low-roofed house, that stood alone, surrounded by outbuildings, like a solitary farm-house.

No answer came to his first knock, and he pounded again, more lustily than ever. Still silence reigned within.

"Hillo, inside there!" he yelled. "Are you all asleep, or dead? Open the door, or I'll find a way to burst it."

The thought came to him and he gave the signal knock of the Free Russians. It produced an immediate effect. A return signal came from within. After a second exchange of signals the door opened, revealing the form of a sturdy, stalwart Russian, with a harsh, stern face, which was adorned with a huge beard.

He held a lamp over his head, and looked surlily at his visitor.

"What a rattling time you keep up!" he growled. "Who are you, and what is your business?"

"Who I am doesn't matter," answered Clark. "My business is to get alongside your stove."

He accompanied his words with some peculiar signals, which the Russian appeared to recognize. He made way for the youth to enter, though his face continued frowning and surly.

The room which they entered was warm as an oven. On one side stood a Russian stove, a huge affair of brick and mortar, which filled the house with a stifling heat. In this chilly country our flimsy stoves would be laughed at. Their brick stoves are heated with a wood fire until every brick is a reservoir of heat, and will continue to give out heat for hours after the fire is extinguished.

"Mercy, but that feels good!" cried the chilled lad, as he crowded up to the hot brick mass. "I'm like an icicle. I'm afeared I'll all run away in water when I thaw out. But hang me if you ain't a surly old curmudgeon! Did you want me to freeze into a statue at your door?"

"I was asleep," growled the Russian. "And I don't care to keep open house for wanderers. Who are you? What do you want? What brings you here afoot?"

"Business," answered Clark, shortly. "Wait till I warm up."

He remained silently drinking in the enlivening heat. The Russian seated himself on a bench, and fixed his twinkling eyes curiously on his visitor. He seemed anxious to learn his errand, yet too surly in disposition to demand it outright.

Ten minutes of silence passed away. They were minutes of enjoyment to Clark, for he felt that he had got a little the best of his inhospitable host. The latter at length broke impatiently out:

"Come, sirrah, your business. You are no idle traveler, or you couldn't have those signals. I know there's work ahead. Who sent you to me?"

Clark looked up with a disdainful smile.

"So the shoe is on the other foot, is it? What is your name?"

"What is that your affair?"

"I can't tell my errand without I am sure of my man."

"My name is Adam Jeliaboff," answered the Russian.

"Then this is for you."

Clark slipped off one of his boots. He then removed his stocking and drew from the sole of it a folded paper. This he handed with an air of great satisfaction to the Russian.

"You bet I'm glad to get rid of it," he remarked. "I've been three times to-day within an inch of being nabbed. If I'd been caught with that paper on me, you know the balance." He ran his hand significantly around his throat. "Hanging may be fun, but it's not my kind of fun."

The Russian paid little attention to these words. He had snatched the paper from Clark's offering hand, tore open the seals, and was reading it with eager eyes. His rugged face worked with a dozen different emotions as he did so.

He at length jumped up and paced the floor with heavy strides, his frowning brows yet bent on the document. Finally he sharply turned, opened the door of the stove, and thrust the dangerous paper into the burning coals. Clark watched the movement with a feeling of satisfaction.

"I ought to have done the same thing six hours ago," he remarked. "Nobody but a young fool would have risked his neck for that slip of paper. My part of the job is done, anyhow. Now, what's in the wind?"

"I must be off to St. Petersburg instantly," rejoined the Russian. "The orders are peremptory. I have not a minute to lose."

"Best wait till morning," remarked the youth, with a shrug.

"No. It must be immediate. You can spend the night here if you wish."

"Nary time," answered Clark. "I'll go with you. But can't you spread out a bit of provender for a starving stranger. I'm as hollow as an oak log."

The Russian, at this reminder, extracted some food from a chest and laid it on the table before his guest. He then hastily left the room.

"All right, my jolly cove," remarked the hungry lad. "Your grub is better than your company. I'd sooner know what's inside of Russian pie than all the documents ever got up."

When the peasant returned, ten minutes afterward, the table was empty of everything but dishes.

"That's right," he said, approvingly. "We have no time to spare."

He hastened to envelop himself in thick wraps. He looked at Clark's cloak, with its fur lining, and nodded in approbation.

"That will do," he said. "It is a bitter night."

"What's in the wind?" asked Clark. "Sleigh, boat, cart or balloon?"

"We have a sleighride before us," answered the Russian. "Come. Time presses."

The open door revealed a sturdy sleigh, drawn by a brace of stout horses, who seemed impatient to be off.

The Russian returned to the room which they had just left, and brought out with him a closely wrapped package, which he carried with great care and thrust under the seat of the sleigh.

"Papers of the society of Free Russians," he explained to his guest.

"I hope they ain't the hanging sort," answered the latter. "I've had enough of that kind to-day."

"Oh! no; they are perfectly innocent. Come, sir, we must be off."

A queer grimace passed over his face as Clark climbed into the sleigh. Evidently there was more in the package than he cared to reveal to his guest.

In a moment he sprung into the vehicle, seized the reins, and gave a chirruping command to the horses. Away they darted at a swift pace.

"Where are your bells?" asked Clark, as the sleigh sped with ghostly silence through the night.

"Bells are for merry-makers," answered the stern-voiced Russian. "Silence is our motto—stillness and swiftness. The work of the Free Russians is done in the quiet of night, not in the roar of day."

He fell into a stolid silence. Clark crouched by his side, wrapping himself close in his cloak.

The night air was biting, and the swift flight of the horses made a wind that cut their faces like a knife-blade.

In a few minutes the sleigh entered the shelter of the forest. Here the cold was less intense, as the air lay still under the trees.

"We have a long drive before us," remarked the Russian, "and none too safe a one. This forest is generally safe, but I am told that this last show has driven— Ha!" he interrupted himself, as a strange sound broke on their ears—a long-drawn, melancholy howl.

"What is that?" cried the startled youth.

"I was about to tell you that the cold has driven the wolves down this way. I need not speak. They have answered for themselves."

"Wolves?" cried Clark, as the memory of some old stories of the wolves of Russia crowded into his brain. "Are we in danger?"

"Our lives depend on the speed of our horses," answered the Russian. He laid the whip sharply on the horses as he spoke.

But the animals needed no spur. That frightful sound had come to their ears. The howl was repeated, yet nearer. With a bound that tossed the sleigh like a feather the alarmed creatures sprung forward. Onward with their utmost speed they rushed over the crackling snow, tearing through the gloom-laden depths of the forest.

Again came the howl, now nearer and louder. A few minutes of anxious suspense passed. Then the white surface of the road behind them, faintly visible in the clear starlight, displayed some dark, moving forms.

Clark looked back with as much interest as alarm. To be chased by wolves! This was a new experience. The cry of the savage brutes came in shrill accents to his ears.

"Can your horses outrun them?" he asked.

"We can try," rejoined the Russian. "If they don't head us. Keep up your courage, young man. I've been through worse dangers and come out safe."

"I don't scare easily," was the proud answer of the nettled youth. "Some of them will bite the dust before they touch me."

He drew his revolver, while a look of stern energy came into his eyes.

On for a mile sped the hot chase. Other wolves had leaped into the road, until there seemed a hundred of them in the long, dark line behind the sleigh. The nearest of them were not a hundred feet distant. Their red tongues could be seen hanging from their open jaws as they came loping on.

And now came a rustling in the bushes, and a group of lank forms sprung out into the road just ahead of the sleigh. The fierce creatures sprung for the horses, but only one of them succeeded in the desperate effort.

A wild scream of pain and fear came from the maddened horse. It was echoed by the report of a pistol, and the wolf fell to the ground with a bullet through its brain.

At the same instant one of the baffled creatures made a spring at the sleigh. It was met by the Russian with a blow from a keen-bladed hatchet that split the animal's skull as if it had been made of paper.

"There's two of the devils gone," he cried. "That will stop them for a minute."

In fact, the other wolves sprung upon their slain comrades in a snarling heap. Rending and raging they tore the flesh from their bones ere yet the blood had ceased to flow.

"That is our best chance," said the Russian. "Feed them on wolf-meat as long as we can keep it up. Here comes the loping rascals again. Be careful, young man; don't waste your bullets."

The incident had hardly stopped the wolfish line for a minute. On they came, again gaining on the sleigh. Clark reserved his fire until a gaunt fellow came very near, and then dropped him with a bullet.

This exercise was repeated until every chamber of the revolver was empty. It had proved successful in delaying the pursuers for some time. The edge of the forest could not now be far off. If they could gain the posting village all was safe.

"Have you no more cartridges?" asked the Russian anxiously.

"No; and my pistol is empty."

"That is bad. Five minutes more and we would be safe. There come the hungry rogues."

The head of the chasing line was scarce ten paces in the rear of the sleigh. They were gaining step by step on the fugitives.

"Give me the empty pistol," said the Russian. "They are suspicious brutes and any thing thrown out stops them."

He flung the weapon back on the snow. He was right. Instantly the wolves halted, as if afraid to pass what might be a trap. The darting sleigh gained some distance before the wolves ventured past this doubtful object.

"That was well done," cried Clark. "Here they come again. One more stoppage and we can discount them. What shall we throw out next?"

He eagerly sought in the bottom of the sleigh for some object, but there was nothing to be found.

"Is there nothing?" cried the Russian. "Here come the whole crew. They will lap us in a minute more."

"Nothing but this," cried Clark, with a sudden recollection.

He stooped and drew from under the sleigh seat the package which the Russian had deposited there.

"We will give them the papers of the Free Russians to feed on," said the reckless lad, standing upright in the sleigh.

"What are you doing?" yelled the Russian, in a tone of wild alarm. "Hold! On your life!"

He was too late. Clark had flung the package with all his strength back into the mass of pursuing wolves.

The Russian, white with terror, struck the horses a savage blow with the whip. They sprung madly forward.

Nothing for the instant followed the fall of the package. The wolves halted, gathered around it; flung themselves by dozens on it, rending it with teeth and claws.

Then there came a terrible, blinding flash. A roar louder than the thunder peal broke on the air. To the eyes of the awe-struck travelers the atmosphere seemed full of the bodies of wolves. One of them fell with a crash into the sleigh. The frozen snow, hurled in masses into the air, poured down in a blinding volley on their heads.

CHAPTER XI.

PICKING UP THE NIHILIST PLOT.

CLARK sat silent as if stunned, while the sleigh tossed wildly behind the maddened flight of the terrified horses. Snow, earth, and bleeding fragments of shattered wolves, continued to fall. It seemed to be raining blood and flesh.

The Russian, with face of ashy hue, and firmly clinched teeth, rose and flung from the sleigh its ghastly burden. He shook like an aspen leaf as he did so. Evidently he passed through a moment of deadly terror.

On they went. He looked backward with a shudder. A darker gloom had followed the intense blaze. A deeper silence had succeeded the ear-splitting crash. The wolfish pursuit had ceased. Such of the animals as remained alive had slunk back into the depths of the forest.

Clark shook off his lethargy and looked shrewdly at his companion. He had been thinking intently during the past few minutes.

"So it seems the papers of the Free Russians are good for wolves," he sarcastically remarked. "They must contain very strong language."

"Yes," answered the Russian briefly.

Silence reigned for several minutes more. Then Clark again looked up.

"What was it?" he sharply asked. "Dynamite?"

The Russian shrugged his shoulders, but made no answer.

"For what purpose were you taking it to St. Petersburg?"

The cornered Russian was saved the necessity of a reply by their driving at that moment into the village from which Clark had escaped a few hours before. The streets were filled with peasants gazing around in stupefied wonder. The noise of the explosion had come to their ears, and shaken their huts like an earthquake.

Dozens of questions were hurled at the travelers as the sleigh rattled through the double line of villagers. The Russian yelled back:

"A dynamite mine exploded under the road. Just escaped with our lives. Good-by. Can't stop."

Away went the sleigh. A cry of another character broke from one of the villagers, as he recognized the figure of the young man, who reclined silently back in the sleigh.

"It is he! The young Nihilist! The escaped criminal! Stop the sleigh!"

They might as well have attempted to stop a lightning flash. The horses were yet mad with terror, and rushed on with ungovernable speed. Clark caught a glimpse of the face of the official whom he had so cleverly tricked that afternoon. But in a minute they shot past, ere he could rub his sleepy eyes open. In a minute more they

were past the village and on the open road beyond.

"We have left a meat-market for them, if they like wolf," remarked the Russian, "Now for the city."

"You have not answered my question yet," said Clark. "It was dynamite, then?"

"It wasn't butter and cheese, at any rate," growled the surly Russian.

"And what were you taking it to St. Petersburg for?"

"That's none of your affairs; nor mine either. You must know, young man, it is our duty to obey orders, and ask no questions."

"That's a cock that won't crow in these diggings," answered Clark decidedly. "You and your friends are trying to buy me for a fool, but I've a notion you'll make a bad bargain. When I joined the Free Russians I was told they had no murdering intentions. They were only organized for political agitation. That's all very pretty, but I don't approve of dynamite politics. Do you suppose I'm too blind to see through your game? That Free Russian dodge is a pretty one, but it won't go down. I am not to be warped into the Nihilist crew by lies."

"What do you mean?" cried the Russian angrily. "You have taken the oath of our society. You know the penalty of treachery. Duty or death. There are no half-way measures. The knife or the pistol for the traitor. Such is our motto."

"I cannot be tricked into joining murderers," answered Clark with stern resolution. "If I find any trace of murdering designs I will save the victim at the risk of my life. There is my platform in plain words. Now do your worst."

Silence succeeded. The Russian made no answer to the declaration of his indignant companion. Clark lay back with closed lips and flashing eyes. He had taken his stand, and intended to keep to it through thick and thin.

The moon was now rising in the eastern sky, and flinging its mild beams athwart the snow. The sky of the winter night was glittering with stars. Far before them stretched the road, straight as an arrow, in a long white line. The horses, now brought down to a more sober speed, rushed onward with a steady gait. Deathly silence and solitude reigned around. The solitary team looked like something ghostly flashing through the depth of the night.

Midnight was not far distant when they reached the vicinity of the city, visible afar like a dim glow on the horizon. It lightened up as they came nearer, with its multitude of gas-lamps.

"Can we get safely in?" asked Clark. "I ran a heavy risk in getting out."

"Trust me," returned the Russian. "The Free Russians leave nothing to chance."

He drove around to a barrier different from that at which Clark had emerged. The officer of the night came out with his lantern and asked a few questions. But the keen eyes of the observant youth failed not to notice that certain mysterious signals passed between his companion and the official. Clark lay back with redoubled surprise.

"Nihilists here, too!" he said to himself. "By

Jove, it is as Ivan declared! They are everywhere. The whole country is undermined and honeycombed with them."

The streets of the city seemed deserted as they drove onward. They were well-lighted, and here and there a human form started up out of the darkness, but no other vehicles appeared. In fact the Russian seemed desirous of avoiding observation, and drove only through the most retired avenues, carefully avoiding the Nefski and the other fashionable streets. He at length drew up in the court-yard of a house near the center of the city.

"We will spend the night here," he remarked, briefly, to Clark.

There was a tone of authority in his voice, as if he dared the young man to rebel against his decision. But the latter was quite wise enough to know that he had no choice. He must haunt the hiding-places of his fellow-conspirators. Besides, he knew just enough about their designs to make him anxious to learn more.

"How about your horses?" he asked, as the Russian led the way into the house.

"They will be attended to," was the brief reply.

The mansion seemed a large one. The Russian walked onward as if thoroughly acquainted with it. No one appeared. It seemed freely open to any one who chose to enter.

After passing several halls and stairways, however, a man made his appearance from a side room. Clark recognized him at a glance as one of the persons who had accompanied him in the sleigh with Ivan. He looked without a trace of surprise at the travelers.

"So you have arrived," he briefly said.

"Yes, and tired out. Find us some place to sleep. This young man has done a hard day's work."

"Follow me."

He led on through the mansion. Finally he opened the door of a room and turned to Clark.

"You will find a bed in there. You have done your duty faithfully. Good-night. May you have dreams of freedom for Russia."

Clark entered the room. But not to stay there long. His first movement was to hastily throw off his heavy boots. His next was to step out again into the hall. In the distance he could see the gleam of the light borne by the man who had just spoken to him. At once he put himself stealthily on the track, first fixing in his memory the location of his bedroom.

"It is one of the thinnest things out," soliloquized the shrewd fellow as he moved cautiously onward. "Did they fancy I was too blind to see their signs? I am suspected, I perceive that. And there is some game afoot which I am not to know. But if I don't find it out it won't be my fault. If they think to make a cat's-paw of Clark Cloverly, they've got hold of the wrong coon. I didn't swear to help murderers, and if there's a game of this sort afoot, I'll blow on it if they knife me the next minute. They can't warp me blind into a gang of murderers."

He was trailing the distant lamp as he thus soliloquized. It moved forward through several passages. Finally it halted. Clark was near enough to perceive the forms of the two

men, who had paused before the door of a room. This they now opened and entered. He again moved forward with his eyes fixed on this door.

"It may be a blind chase," he said to himself, "but if there is anything to be learned, I am not going to wear ears and not use them. I want to know just where I stand."

He moved with great caution. Other ears might be on the alert, and he did not care to be caught prowling about that house at midnight. His shoeless feet fell noiselessly on the uncarpeted floors. He reached the door of the room through which the two men had passed.

A faint murmur of voices came from within. Clark applied his ear to the keyhole, and to the crack at the bottom of the door, but in vain. No words could be distinguished. He bit his lips in spite.

In vain he looked around. No solution to the difficulty appeared. It seemed as if he must go back without the much-desired information.

The eyes of the young eavesdropper glittered with determination. He set his lips firmly.

"Nothing ventured, nothing won," he declared. "If I give the alarm, so much the worse, but there's only one way for it."

Clasping the door-handle he turned it very carefully and slowly. The latch was drawn noiselessly back. With still greater caution he pulled at the door. It opened without a sound. The occupants of the room had fortunately neglected to turn the key.

So slowly was this performed that he was a full minute in opening the door sufficiently to reveal a slender crack, through which the light within was just visible.

He now with the same care released the latch. Carefully he opened the door a little wider, making a crack large enough to look through. No persons were visible within. They were out of the line of sight from his position.

This was an agreeable discovery. They were not likely to observe that the door had been opened. And the main object of his enterprise had been gained. The low murmur of talk was now replaced by distinctly audible words.

"I suppose this is what some folks would call dishonorable," said Clark, to himself. "But when a chap has got a rope around his neck, a pistol to his ear, and a knife over his heart, he isn't in a position to draw fine lines. I'll take the risk on the honor; but I'm bound to find out what's in the wind."

The words that came to his ears shaped themselves into sentences. The conspirators talked in low tones, but his hearing was sharp and quick.

"So your plans have changed since morning?" The voice was that of Adam, his late companion.

"Yes. It is lucky we can do without your stuff now, since it has been wasted on the wolves."

"Ah!" answered Adam, in a shuddering tone. "I never had such a scare in my life. Only a miracle saved us from being torn into ribbons."

"I wouldn't care to take such a risk. But this is our game in short. The tyrant goes to the marine parade to-morrow. This we have just learned for certain. The mine under Little Garden street is all ready. Your package

of dynamite would have made the thing sure, but we will have to use what we have."

"Suppose he does not take that way?"

"Then there is only the hand grenade plan. Ryssakoff and Grenevitsky are ready for the work. They will push up and fling them into the tyrant's carriage. There is a spot near the bridge over the Catharine Canal where the street is out of order. There the carriage must go slow. That is our place to strike."

Their voices now fell so low that the listener could not make them out.

When he again was able to understand them the subject of their conversation was changed.

"What you tell me of this boy must be looked into," came to his ears. "He is not to be trusted."

"What shall we do with him?"

"Lock him up till it is over. Then he can do no harm."

Clark had heard enough. He cautiously closed the door and slipped away.

"Forewarned is forearmed," he said. "You can lock the cage, but you will not have your bird in it. If murder is in the wind I am going to have my share in the game."

In a few minutes he reached his room. Here he drew on his boots. In a minute more he was making his way toward the outer door of the house.

"I'm afraid, my good friends," he said to himself, "that you will be locking the stable door after the horse is stolen."

CHAPTER XII.

THE THROWING OF THE BOMBS.

It was the afternoon of the 13th of March, 1881, a day of vital interest to Russia. The parade of the Marine Corps had been fixed for that day. All St. Petersburg was early alive, for it was known that the emperor, Alexander II., who had for some time kept himself close in his palace, in dread of the Nihilists, would be present at the review.

There was great joy among the loyal inhabitants of the city, and great fear also, for the enemies of the Government were known to be many and fearless. No one could tell what that day might bring forth.

The streets were crowded with people in holiday attire. The police were fully on the alert. A strong force of military was under arms, and stationed at various points about the city. Every conceivable precaution had been taken. When the emperor drove, in his handsome state carriage, along the Nefski, toward the review grounds, such a roar of welcome went up from the assembled people that it seemed as if all St. Petersburg were faithful subjects of the czar.

The imperial carriage was surrounded by the military staff of the emperor, and followed by a large body of mounted Cossacks. It seemed impossible that danger could approach him. The *cortege* drove rapidly on through a bright sunlight that seemed to presage good fortune, and the roll of loyal congratulations went up like a continuous peal of artillery.

Yet throughout the crowd the disaffected were everywhere. Men who hated despotism, who demanded a popular government, who dreamed of a republic, even many who hated

everything that exists, who wished to overturn the world and replace it with a new one, were present in hundreds, and many a dark face and an angry scowl followed the imperial party in its progress.

There had been an effort to warn the emperor of his peril. At an early hour that day a paper had been given to the officer on duty at the door of the Winter Palace, with request that it be taken to the emperor. But the officers in charge, fearing that it might contain some deadly explosive, had detained it.

In the crowd that surged backward and forward in front of the palace might have been seen the slender yet graceful form, the handsome face, and bright eyes, of Clark Cloverly. It was his hand which had sent the document mentioned into the palace, after he had made a vain effort to be himself admitted.

He bit his lip with spite on seeing the imperial *cortege* drive out into the street.

"He laughs at my warning then? Thinks it the vaporing of some lunatic perhaps. I am afraid he will find it sober truth. He should know by this time the men he has to deal with."

Clark followed discontentedly the crowd, which surged onward toward the parade ground. Since escaping from the Nihilist head-quarters he had been fully determined to warn the emperor of his danger. But being himself in momentary peril of arrest he was obliged to proceed with great caution. His efforts, so far, had failed, and he walked gloomily along, trying to devise some new plan by which to checkmate the murderous schemes of the Nihilists. There was little danger of his being recognized. The crowd was too dense, and every one too much occupied with other thoughts.

Suddenly along the center of the street a horseman dashed at full speed. He was in the uniform of the palace, and there was something in his face that gave a sense of coming trouble to the observing people. In his hand he firmly clutched an open letter. In a moment he had come and gone, the iron hoofs of his horse falling almost noiselessly on the snow-clad surface of the avenue.

People looked at one another in doubt. What meant this messenger who had come and gone like a phantom? Was he the bearer of ill-tidings?

He dashed onward at full speed. The review had ended when he reached the parade ground. The dense bodies of troops were marching off in serried array saluting the emperor as they passed. Alexander of Russia sat erect on his horse, his tall figure, handsome face, and dignified bearing, making him noticeable in the throng of richly-dressed officers and noblemen who surrounded him.

The horseman pressed into the titled crowd. He was recognized as a high official of the palace, and way was at once made for him. He handed the paper which he bore to the emperor, and spoke a few words to him in a low tone.

Hundreds of curious eyes were bent upon the pair as the emperor opened and cast his eye over the paper, his florid face growing slightly pale as he perused its contents.

It was the warning letter of Clark Cloverly. The officials of the palace had ventured to open

it, after the emperor's departure, and had at once dispatched it after him.

The czar crushed the note of warning in his hand, and remained for a moment in silent reflection. He then handed it back to the officer.

"I doubt if this is not some uneasy fool's device," he remarked in a low tone. "However, we will not go back through Little Garden street. It may be mined, as this document says."

"And the Catharine Canal bridge, sire?"

"That we will have to cross. Ride back at speed, and see that the police are on the alert there."

In a half-hour afterward the last of the reviewed troops marched from the ground, and the imperial party turned toward the city.

The roars of congratulation which greeted the emperor on his return were more enthusiastic than those which had previously welcomed him. So much of the danger of the day had passed. In a half-hour more he would be safe within the solid walls of the Winter Palace.

The conspirators, of whom there were many in the street, looked on with some disquiet. The carriages were not taking the expected direction. Little Garden street which lay in the direct return road, was avoided by a long detour.

"What does it mean?" said one to another. "Can any suspicion have got abroad? All our work is useless."

"Looks as if there was a traitor somewhere in the camp," was the reply.

Clark Cloverly had sought the vicinity of the bridge over the Catharine Canal, the next point of danger. It proved to be here, as the conspirators had said. The bridge was obstructed with snow, and a large party of *moujiks* were at work, actively shoveling a free passage for the imperial *cortege*.

A force of police had gathered, in accordance with the instructions given. The carriages of the coming party broke into view. The waving plumes of horsemen, the pennoned spears of the Cossacks, told that it was the emperor who came. Clark pressed forward. His young heart was beating high with excitement, his brain throbbing with anxiety. Some last effort must be made to warn the emperor of his danger.

"Stand back there!" cried an officer, sternly. "Back, I say! There is room on the pavement."

"Let me pass," demanded Clark. "I must see and warn the emperor. There is a plot to attack him at the bridge."

"Maybe you are in the plot," replied the officer, suspiciously.

"You, rather," was Clark's sharp answer. "If you refuse to let me see the emperor, it is you who put him in peril. Stop him yourself, then, and hand him this paper. It will warn him of his danger."

The officer took the proffered paper. He was about to open and read it, when a cry came from a fellow-official, who had been attracted by the controversy.

"Ha! it is the young villain that escaped us yesterday! Arrest him! It is the American Nihilist!"

In a moment the hands of two strong policemen were laid on Clark's shoulders.

Almost at the same instant the head of the approaching *cortege* came up. The emperor and his staff swept swiftly by. The close-riding troop of Cossacks followed. There was something of the savage in their wild, bearded faces, brown and wrinkled as if by years of wind and sun.

On went the train, but there came a sharp recoil. The head of the party was checked by the workmen, who had not been given time to move out of the way. The carriages slowed up, and the horsemen were pushed back into a crowding throng.

It was a fatal check. Clark, firmly held by his captors, groaned with anxiety as he saw one of the *moujiks* spring quickly forward, and fling some object at the emperor's carriage.

Fortunately it was thrown with a bad aim. It struck the ground behind the carriage, and exploded with a sharp report, scattering its dangerous fragments in all directions.

None of the imperial party were hurt, but two Cossacks fell wounded from their horses. The murderous effort had been made and failed. The Prefect of Police, who was in a sleigh just behind the imperial carriage, sprung out and seized the assassin, who drew and fired a revolver. His aim was a wild one, however, and ere he could repeat it the weapon was dashed from his hand.

The explosion of the bomb was followed by a hush of excited fear. A cry of dread broke from the crowd of spectators. The mounted troops pushed forward with intense anxiety, while cries of rage and fear broke from their lips.

The carriage of the emperor stopped, and he stepped out into the street.

"Fear not, my children," he said; "I am safe, you see. The assassins have failed."

A shout of glad congratulation followed his words. It was checked by an alarming sound. The terrible roar of another exploding bomb filled the air. With a cry of deathly pain the emperor sunk to the ground.

Clark had witnessed all this with a feeling of intense horror and anxiety. All his efforts to warn the emperor had failed. His death seemed fated. A groan of intense feeling broke from his lips as he turned furiously to his captors, crying out:

"It is you who have killed the emperor! I would have warned him! If he dies, his blood is on your heads!"

By this time a terrible excitement surrounded the imperial party. In vain the police sought to keep back the anxious spectators. They surged forward in a dense mass.

The excitement caused by the explosion of the first bomb had enabled several persons to break through the cordon of police. One of these had pressed close up, and flung a bomb at the very feet of the emperor.

The flying fragments of this terrible weapon had broken both his legs and penetrated his body; and, by a strange retribution, one of these deadly fragments had struck the murderer himself. He lay bleeding and dead almost by the side of his prostrate victim.

"Back—back!" cried the prefect. "Place him in my sleigh! To the palace at once! It may not be serious. The emperor yet lives, good people! Quick! there may not be a moment to lose!"

In a few minutes more the *cortege* had swept on. But what a terrible change those few minutes had made. The great Czar of the Russias, five minutes before well and full of vigor, now lay bleeding and dying, hastening back to die in the palace which he had recently quitted in all the vigor of full life.

In the excitement Clark had disappeared. The frenzied rush of the people had released him from the hands of his captors, and when they bethought themselves again of their prisoner he had vanished.

He was far away, hurrying toward the distant streets, into which the tidings of the terrible deed preceded him, running over the city like an electric flash. The heart of the busy city ceased for the moment to beat. Its breath was held for a dread instant of awe and horror.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DOOM OF A TRAITOR.

THERE was terrible excitement in St. Petersburg for the succeeding days. And the echo of this excitement covered the whole civilized world. Everywhere the swift electricity bore the tidings with lightning speed. "The great Czar of the Russias has fallen! Alexander, the emperor, lies dying!"

And the whole world waited anxiously for further tidings. Would he die? Would he recover? Soon came speeding the fatal news. The emperor was dead. It was a moment of world-wide excitement. The Nihilists had triumphed. Everywhere the Socialists, the Communists, the advocates of human rights, the haters of despotism, rejoiced. There was joyful clasping of hands by the down-trodden of the nations, for they were mad enough to imagine that the bursting of that bomb had freed the world from oppression, and that Russia would quickly wheel into the ranks of the free nations.

They have been taught better since then. It is easy to kill a man, but it is not easy to change a government.

The police of the great city were busy in seeking to trace the hiding-places of the murderers. Of the bomb-throwers, one was dead. The other was a prisoner. But he was dumb to their questions. He had the true Nihilist spirit. He could die, but not betray his confederates.

The city was scoured far and wide. Every suspected place was visited. The police had some clues, and were not long in discovering the mine under Little Garden street, of which they had been warned. It was dug to the center of the street, and loaded with dynamite. It led to the cellar of a neighboring house, from which the mine would have been exploded, had the emperor passed that way. In this house two prisoners were secured.

Among others eagerly sought for was the American boy, Clark Cloverly; but he had vanished. His father's house was visited, but he

had not been seen there. Only a dreadful anxiety of the father and sister was there discovered. The murder of the emperor had filled them with terror. Clark was among the conspirators! He was known! It would be death to him to be taken!

We must follow the adventures of the young fugitive, who had slipped from the loosened hands of his captors and sunk hastily into the crowd that was hurrying toward the point of the explosion.

Clark made his way slowly from that dangerous locality toward the heart of the city. He had little fear now of being recognized. The people were too full of terror and excitement to have a thought left but for one thing—the fatal assault on the emperor.

But he was shrewd enough to know that this would not last. It was necessary to seek some hiding-place in advance of the sharp search which would soon be instituted.

He had learned enough of the haunts of the Nihilists to know where to conceal himself, and long before the police could get on his track he was safely beyond their reach.

Two days passed away. In the upper rooms of a Russian house in a secluded portion of the city had gathered a group of stern-faced men. There was a look of fierce triumph on their faces. Their voices were deep with the thought that they had slain him whom they viewed as their great oppressor.

In the group was one woman, Sophie Peroffskaya, whom we have already met. She seemed the leading spirit in the business for which they were now assembled.

This business was no ordinary one. Another deed of vengeance was to be done. In their midst stood, bound and helpless, a culprit, accused of treason to the Nihilists, and doomed to the death of a traitor.

It was the American youth, Clark Cloverly!

Accused of treason by some who had observed his efforts to warn the emperor, he had been seized and imprisoned immediately on entering this hiding-place of the conspirators, and was now brought into a council of the society to suffer the penalty of his alleged treachery.

But there was no flinching from the threatened death. The fearless youth stood proudly before his accusers, and returned their dark and lowering looks with glances as bold and stern as their own.

"You accuse me of treason," he boldly said. "Treason to what?"

"To the society, to which you swore allegiance," answered Sophie. "You were warned at the time that death would follow any foul play. You shall find that we are not to be trifled with."

"Nor am I," answered Clark. "You deceived and lied to me. It was the Free Russians I joined, not the Nihilists. There was to be no murder done. It was only political agitation. I do not belong to the bloodthirsty Nihilists. I cannot be false to them. If you kill me it will be a murder."

"That plea will not answer," rejoined the stern-faced woman. "You joined us. That is enough. If you chose to do it blindly you have had the chance to open your eyes since. We

have but one way of dealing with treachery, and that is by death to the traitor."

"By murder, you mean," cried the undaunted boy. "I am no member of your bloody gang. You can kill me if you want, but you can not make me acknowledge that I ever joined such a crew. I was free from you the moment I learned that you were liars."

Sophie paid no attention to this remark, but turned to one of the men present. It was Adam Jeliaboff, Clark's companion in the sleigh-ride.

"What have you to say in this matter?" she asked.

The surly conspirator fixed his eyes harshly on the prisoner, and replied:

"From the moment that the dynamite exploded among the wolves this young man turned traitor. I could see it in his eyes, and hear it in his words. When we reached the city I intended to have him kept under lock and key until the deed was done. But he escaped from the house for the purpose of betraying us."

"I escaped because I found you out," answered Clark. "Did you suppose I was fool enough not to see that you were making a cat's paw of me? I followed you. I heard your talk, and that I was to be locked up until the whole business was over. If you want to know the truth there it is. You played with me. You let me know half your schemes, and now want to hold me responsible for the whole of them. You made a bad bargain, let me tell you that, when you bought an American boy for a fool."

Sophie turned, with no heed to Clark's words, and signed to another of the persons present. There was nothing of the woman in her eyes. They had rather the baleful light of the tiger.

"What have you to say in this matter?" she asked.

"I saw the prisoner at the door of the Winter Palace," was the reply. "He was refused admittance. He then gave a folded paper to the officer of the gate."

Sophie turned to another.

"What is your evidence?" she asked.

"I saw the prisoner near the bridge," was the answer. "He sought to pass the police, but was stopped. He then handed a paper to the officer."

"Did you hear any words?"

"Yes. He said that the emperor's life was in danger. He had come there to warn him of the plot."

"That is enough," remarked the woman, sternly. "The evidence of treason is conclusive. His purpose failed, and the despot was removed. But none of us are safe while a traitor lives. What have you to say to the evidence offered?" She turned to Clark, who stood upright, though his hands and feet were bound.

"I don't see that any such farce was needed," answered he, boldly. "I could have told you all that; and more, if you want to know it. It is you who are traitors, not I. You brought me into your society by a lie. You kept me there by lies. I learned the truth when I heard the dynamite explode. From that moment I ceased to be one of you, and vowed to save the empe-

ror. I did my best to save him. If you murdered him in spite of me, it was no fault of mine. There you have it all."

He faced his unrelenting foes with a boldness which they could not but admire. Yet there was no show of pity in their eyes. Death or blind obedience was the motto of their society.

Sophie again faced the ring of stern men who surrounded the accused captive.

"You have heard," she asked. "What is your verdict?"

"Death!" came in harsh accents from every lip.

A slight shudder passed through Clark's frame. He shut his eyes for an instant. It was horrible to see death so near him. Yet he was bound to show no craven spirit. The honor of America was to be upborne. He threw off the momentary feeling, and faced his executioners with undaunted face.

"Have you any word to leave for your friends?" asked the woman.

"Tell them that I died like an honorable and whole-souled American," answered Clark. "That is all. Do your worst, murderers."

One of the conspirators advanced. He was a bearded, dark-featured, scowling giant. The muscles stood out like whip-cord on his arms, as he bared them for his task. From a sheath he had drawn a long-bladed, murderous knife.

He caught the bound prisoner by the shoulder, and raised the deadly weapon.

"Look your last upon the sun," he said. "Death is the doom of traitors."

The bound lad looked unflinchingly in his eyes.

"Strike!" he cried. "With my last word, I declare that I am no traitor."

The strong arm was drawn back for the deadly blow. A murderous light gleamed in the eyes of the executioner.

But ere he could strike there came a sudden change. A man who had stood for the last minute in the doorway sprang forward and seized the uplifted arm.

"By Heaven!" he cried, "you shall not kill him! If he dies I die with him, for I owe him my life!"

He wrenched the knife from the murderous hand, and flung it across the room.

Clark looked up with a surge of hope. It was Ivan Stretzlitz, whom he had rescued on the ice.

This diversion produced a fierce commotion in the throng of conspirators.

"How dare you interfere?" cried Sophie. "He has been condemned, and shall die."

"He shall not!" answered Ivan as fiercely.

"He tells the truth. He has been cheated and lied to. I helped to do it myself. You all know that I was opposed to the killing of the emperor. You deceived me as well as him. By Heaven, you shall not harm him!"

"He shall die, I say!" cried Sophie. "Seize this other traitor, brother Nihilists."

The men threw themselves on Ivan, who resisted fiercely. For a minute there was a sharp struggle. It ended in his being felled to the floor by a hard blow. Two of the men threw themselves upon him, and held him despite his cries and struggles.

The brawny conspirator recovered his knife and again advanced toward the condemned captive.

But ere he could reach him there came a sharp whistle that filled the room with its shrill sound. And in through the open door rushed a dozen armed men.

In an instant every person present was covered by the threatening muzzles of revolvers. A stern voice cried:

"Surrender or we will shoot you down like dogs! Up with your hands! The man that attempts to draw a weapon dies!"

The conspirators shrunk back in dismay. It was a party of the police! They were prisoners in the hands of the authorities!

CHAPTER XVI.

BEFORE A RUSSIAN JUDGE.

THE emperor was dead. A new emperor was upon the throne. Yet the high hopes of the conspirators did not seem likely to be realized. They had murdered the despot, yet Russia was no more free than before. The chains were drawn around her more closely than ever.

The police had done their work actively. Most of the Nihilists directly concerned in the assassination were in prison. There was no doubt of their guilt, and no hope of their escape from the gallows. Every member of the society trembled, from end to end of the country, for it was not sure but that the whole secret of the association might be laid bare, and all the membership betrayed.

Yet those who thought so did not know the spirit of the prisoners. No words came from their lips in betrayal of their comrades. Threats and promises were alike useless. Torture would have been wasted. They could die, but they could not prove false to their oaths.

Among these captives was Clark Cloverly. The fact that he had been rescued from a party of Nihilists, who were about to kill him, seemed of no avail in his case. He was immured as closely as if he had been one of their chiefs, and, so far as appeared, he would be dealt with as severely by the authorities.

His father and sister were in serious trouble. They had interviewed the Government officials, but had been rudely repelled.

"I always knew how it would be!" cried Helen, angrily. "I knew that Clark would get into some terrible scrape, and I wish we had never seen this ridiculous country. In America you could shout out your opinion in a crowd and you would only be laughed at. Here they hang you if you whisper them above your breath."

"I would give all my fortune to be away from here with that unfortunate boy," groaned the father. "Yet I have hopes, Helen. The American minister has called on the authorities. They can hardly refuse him."

"Much good he will do!" exclaimed Helen. "Why, they will laugh in his face, and he not know it. I'd be of more use myself."

"You!" answered Mr. Cloverly. "I would not trust you, Helen. You'd break out in some terrible treason, and get yourself in prison, instead of getting Clark out."

"I'll see about that!" cried Helen, seizing her

hat. "I will go this instant. You shall see if I don't do more than you and the minister together."

"No, no; you shall not!"

"Indeed I will. I am not going to desert poor Clark while there is a hope left. And if they refuse me they shall know in plain language what I think of them."

Mr. Cloverly attempted another remonstrance, but he was too late. She was gone. She had all the impulsive disposition of her brother, and nothing could stop her when she once made up her mind.

Mr. Cloverly sat for an hour in groaning despair. He then seized his hat and sought the residence of the American minister. That gentleman was in his office and greeted him with a hopeful smile.

"All is going well," he said. "I have seen the authorities, and have their promise that your son shall have a hearing early next week."

"And do they give any hope?"

"They refuse to commit themselves."

He was interrupted by the entrance of a messenger, who handed him a folded note. This he opened and read, while a look of great surprise passed over his face.

"This is unexpected, Mr. Cloverly," he said. "Your son is called up for a hearing immediately. I am requested to notify you, and to be present. I did not look for such promptness as this."

"I hope it is a good sign," exclaimed Mr. Cloverly, as he seized his hat. "Shall we go at once?"

"Yes, certainly."

Within an hour they were in the ante-room to the justice's court. The hearing was to be private. When they were admitted there was no one present but the judge, a couple of policemen, the prisoner, and two or three persons probably called for witnesses. Yes, there was another—Helen Cloverly.

She turned with an expression of triumph to her surprised father.

"Did I not tell you?" she cried. "It takes a New York girl to have things done quickly, and they shall not hang Clark except they hang me with him."

She walked impulsively to her brother, threw her arm around him, and looked with devoted affection into his eyes.

"Don't you fear, Clark," she said. "It is only a boy's wildness. They can't hang folks for that."

"I have been a fool, Helen," he replied. "But if they begin to hang people for being fools I'm afraid there will be only the judge and the hangman left; and then they will hang each other as the biggest fools of all."

It was very evident that Clark had not lost his spirits.

The examination had progressed for some time before the entrance of Mr. Cloverly and the minister. It was now resumed by the judge, whose face bore a very frowning aspect.

"The prisoner forgets that it is of a very serious crime that he stands accused. Death is the only penalty. Yet in consideration of your youth it may be commuted to banishment if

you will tell all you know concerning the Nihilists. That is the only favor we can show."

"And where will you banish a fellow to?" asked Clark. "To the United States?"

"To Siberia."

"Much obliged, but I guess I won't take any. I'd sooner be hung at once. As for blowing on anybody, I've a notion you are waking up the wrong coon. I didn't flinch under the Nihilist's knife, and I guess you can't scare me."

"Good for you, Clark," whispered his impulsive sister in his ear. "Don't go back on America. Let them see that you are true Yankee born."

"You refuse to name your associates in the assassination?"

"I have no associates in the assassination," answered Clark decidedly. "As for the Nihilists, I know you have them all in prison now. I have seen others, but I don't know their faces or their names. You can't tell much through a black mask."

"Where did you see them?"

"I know no more than the man in the moon. I was taken there after dark, and could not find my way again if my life depended on it. I know only the one place, and that is where I was captured, along with the other prisoners."

The judge looked at him with an incredulous face.

"We know all your movements, young man," he declared. "You went, on the day before the assassination, on a secret mission. You escaped the authorities by skating away. Where did you skate to, and what was your mission?"

"Only to take a note to a man whom you have now in prison. What was in the note I don't know. But I had been forced to swear to go it blind, and so I did. I returned to the city with this man, Adam Jeliaboff."

"Where did you find him?"

Clark described the position of the roadside house.

"Have you anything more to say concerning that enterprise?"

"Only this," answered the prisoner. "I found out by an accident what sort of a crew I was among. I learned that they had lied to me, and that they were plotting to murder the emperor. As soon as I heard that I tried to give him warning of the plot. And he would be living to-day if the officers hadn't been so stupidly suspicious. I did my prettiest to save his life, and was arrested for trying it. When I got away the Nihilists were going to murder me for trying it. And now you are talking of sending me to Siberia for trying it. All I have to say is that it don't pay to try to save an emperor's life in Russia."

Helen squeezed his arm approvingly and looked up proudly into his face.

The judge frowned. He apparently did not believe a word of this story. He signed to the officers, who ranged themselves closer to the prisoner.

"We look on that story as a pure fabrication," he coldly declared. "You have brought no evidence of the truth of a word of it. Yet, on account of your youth, you shall have this last opportunity. Tell all you know about the Nihilists, and you are free. Refuse, and go to the gallows."

"I know nothing about them," answered Clark. "I was sworn to obey the Free Russians. I will not break my oath. If that is not enough, you can drive on to the gallows."

A heavy frown marked the severe face of the judge.

"Remove the culprit," he sternly ordered. "His fate be on his own head."

"No, no," cried Mr. Cloverly, starting forward. "Let me speak to him! Listen to me, my son!"

"If he goes I go with him," exclaimed Helen, still clinging to her brother, and facing the judge with the look of a young rebel.

The scene was interrupted by the entrance to the court-room of several uniformed personages. One of these, a tall, dignified, richly dressed person, spoke in a low tone to the judge. The latter looked at the prisoner with a change of expression.

"Do you recognize me?" asked the stranger of Clark, stepping close to him.

The indomitable youth looked him over from head to foot, with a keen glance.

"I've a notion I do," he replied. "You are the sharp gentleman I saw at the door of the Winter Palace. You refused to let me see the emperor. I then gave you a paper for him. If he had read that paper he might have been alive to day."

"He did read it, but too late," answered the official sorrowfully.

He turned and signed to one of his companions. This person was dressed in the uniform of a common policeman.

"Do you recognize this man?" he asked Clark.

"Calculate so," answered the prisoner. "He's another of the sharp ones. He stopped me from getting to the emperor's carriage at the bridge. I gave him a paper of warning too. All the thanks I got was to be arrested."

The palace official looked with interest on the undaunted prisoner.

"You have been very imprudent, young man," he said. "But you did your best to redeem your imprudence. It is not your fault that your efforts failed. Here are the papers in question." He handed them to the judge. "And here is a third."

The judge opened the latter first. A change of expression came upon his face as he glanced over it.

"From the emperor?"

"Yes."

"The prisoner is released," remarked the judge coldly. "By order of the emperor. The special clemency of his sacred majesty is accorded him. I bow to the decision. But let me warn you, young man, to keep clear in future of Russian conspirators. This is not a safe country to plot in."

We need not pause to describe the scene that followed. The congratulations of the minister; the ardent joy of Mr. Cloverly; the wild enthusiasm of Helen who had been worked up to a nervous fever, and almost went into hysterics of joy at the release of her brother.

Clark was the coolest of the party.

"I'll do my neatest to keep out of such scrapes, you bet," he remarked. "I've come within an ace of being knifed, and within a deuce of being roped. Once is enough for any reasonable Yankee."

We have conducted Clark Cloverly through his adventures among the Nihilists to his fortunate release. It is not our purpose to give here any more of his life's story. It is enough to say that the pardon of the emperor contained no requirement of exile. He was free to remain in Russia, a permission very desirable to his father, whose business there was in no condition to close up.

As for the Nihilist prisoners their fate is a matter of history. Some of them went to Siberia, some to the gallows. Among the exiles to Siberia was Ivan Stretzlitz. His declaration, which the police had overheard, that he was opposed to the murder of the emperor, had saved him from hanging. But he was condemned to no lighter fate, the living death of the terrible mines of Siberia.

"I've got enough of plots and conspirators," declared Clark, "yet I'd give something to save poor Ivan. I'd be dead this minute only for him."

"Now, stop all such nonsense," cried his father, severely. "I will send you back to America if I hear another word of the kind."

"That would suit me to a fraction," answered Clark with a shrug. "This may be a good country for slaves and policemen, but there's not room enough to breathe for a full-blooded Yankee."

THE END.

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